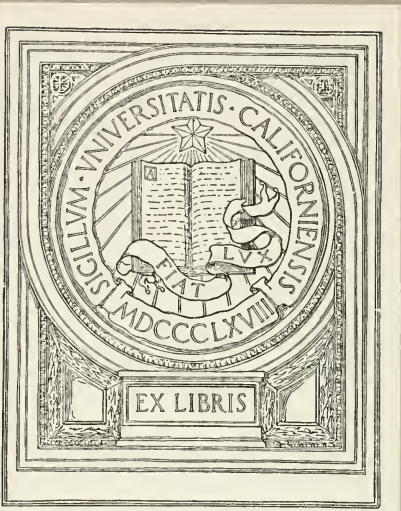
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A STUDY OF SHELLEY

BY

JOHN TODHUNTER

AUTHOR OF "LAURELLA; AND OTHER POEMS," "ALCESTIS," ETC.

"The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn."

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PREFACE.

THE two critical editions of Shelley's Poems recently published by Mr. W. M. Rossetti and Mr. Forman, have given all true lovers of English poetry what they have long sighed for—a text of Shelley as complete and correct as we can now hope to obtain; while the valuable Memoir prefixed to Mr. Rossetti's edition, and the critical biography written by Mr. Symonds for the *English Men of Letters* series, afford ordinary readers an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the main facts of his life, so far as they are at present known. Many excellent pieces of criticism of his poetry have also from time to time appeared; but a philosophical study of his works, which shall assign him his true place in our literature, still remains to be written. The present volume is an attempt to contribute something towards such a study.

Pending the publication of an edition of the Prose Works which shall be tolerably complete, I have confined myself almost altogether to the Poems, except where, as in the poet's earlier years, the prose writings are of almost equal importance, or where a reference to some passage throws light upon the poem under

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consideration. Of the shorter lyrics I have said little, not because I am blind to their beauty, but because I have found it impossible to say anything about most of them which would be of real value to readers of Shelley. It would be easy to write pages of rhapsody upon the beauty of a flower or a dewdrop, and when written they would be as valuable, or as valueless, as such effusions usually are. My endeavour has been to avoid mere praise of what is above all praise, and to study each poem, as I believe Shelley himself would wish it to be studied, with a serious effort to comprehend the ideas which he desired to express in it—the message which it was the burthen of his soul to deliver to the world.

It may seem to those who know the Poems well that I have spent too much time in epitomizing the plots of some of the earlier narratives—*Laon and Cythna*, for instance; but my object has been to write a book for the general public, who know as yet surprisingly little of Shelley, as well as for those who are familiar with his works.

In the punctuation of the passages quoted I have not consistently followed that of any one of the numerous editions, but, in the absence of a final standard, have selected that which seemed to me in each case to be the best.

I have to thank Mr. Rossetti for much cordial help, and many valuable suggestions in the course of the work, and Mr. Garnett for his kind assistance in procuring information upon various points.

ROME, *May* 6, 1880.

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A STUDY OF SHELLEY.

CHAPTER I.

THE PERSONALITY OF SHELLEY.

THE present age has produced three great poets of Democracy—three men whose utterances are full of prophetic fervour, and who seem to gaze forward into the future with eyes which lighten with the vision of some boundless hope for mankind—Shelley, Victor Hugo, and Walt Whitman. All three are full of the new wine of the democratic spirit; it is to the prevalence of this spirit that they look for the regeneration of society and the incoming of a golden age. Their enthusiasm has all the characteristics of a religious enthusiasm. They are poetical missionaries, whose words are designed to go out into the ends of the earth and turn many to righteousness; and, like all enthusiastic utterances, their words will sound very differently in different ears—to some blasphemous, to some foolish, to some ludicrously grotesque, to some immoral and out-

rageous, to most in some degree offensive. So far we may place them all in the same category; but each occupies a sphere of his own, each utters his prophecy in a language of his own. Shelley is the most ethereal and universal, and, on the whole, the most philosophic and self-consistent, dealing with abstract principles and psychological subtleties. He loses sight not merely of individuals, but of nationalities, and sees mankind itself as one mighty brotherhood. Hugo and Whitman are, no doubt, also poets of the human race, but each sees in his own nation, France or America, the sacred nation through whose instrumentality the great deliverance of mankind is to be achieved. Hugo deals with the minute details and paradoxes of human character, the casuistry of good and evil in particular instances; but everything in his works is referred to his own fixed ethical standards—everything is arraigned for judgment at the bar of his own democratic conscience. His characters, even when drawn most directly from nature, have in them something monstrous and superhuman. They are typical creations, like Shelley's Titans, and sometimes approach the limits of caricature in their exaggeration. Walt Whitman is neither, like Shelley, a dreamer aloof from every-day life, in pursuit of ethereal abstractions, of a "something removed from the sphere of our sorrow," nor is he, like Hugo, led into extravagance by love of theatrical effect. He is rather the idealist of real life, in every common event of which his full-blooded imagination discerns an under-working spiritual force—"a hope beyond the shadow of a dream." Shelley and

Hugo prophesy of good things to come ; but Whitman sets our pulses beating with intenser life, which renews this present world, and makes us feel that the golden age is now at the very doors, and waits upon ourselves for its coming into existence. It may, indeed, be remarked that while the sacred France of Hugo is an idea which has come fairly into existence, and lives and struggles in the practical world, the sacred America of Whitman is as yet little more than a prophetic vision ; while, in his conception of the relations between the sexes, the American bard is at least a couple of centuries behind Shelley, some of his expressions being full of the savage sensuality of an unprogressive naturalism.

Of all the poets of his own time, Byron is the man with whom Shelley presents the most obvious points of comparison and contrast. Both were, more distinctly than any of their great contemporaries, revolutionary forces. Both were at war with the society of their time, which they had defied, and which had laid them under its ban. Both were too earnest, too vividly alive, too intensely filled with the passion of their age, to be respectably orthodox. But while Byron was carried forward, half against his will, in a whirlwind of chaotic passion, Shelley flew eagerly and serenely onward on the tempest of enthusiasm, which was the very breath of his being. Byron is a poet of despair—a Lucifer fallen from heaven, who has not lost all his original brightness, nor seems less than archangel ruined, but who brings us lurid flame for light. Shelley is a poet of hope—an unfallen son of the morning, who fills our sky with the

golden light of dawn. Both were insurgents against the conventional religion and morality of their day; but the purer mind of Shelley was more daring than that of Byron. Byron believed or half believed, scoffed and struggled; Shelley attacked as the apostle of a new, if rather vague, religion. Byron was a poet of revolt, but Shelley of revolution.

This essential difference in the spirits of the two men breathes in every line of their poetry. Shelley lives with the winds above the highest mountain-tops, above the home of the thunder, where Byron dwells, and whence he descends, with storm of sounding rhetoric and avalanches or lava of icy or fiery sarcasm, to desolate the smiling cornfields of our average morality. Hence the more immediate effect of Byron's brilliant personality upon the world of men, which Shelley's remoter light is but now reaching. The respectable public could to a great extent ignore the shrill song of the poet of *Prometheus*, while the author of *Cain* and *Don Juan* made himself distinctly audible. Byron wields terrestrial thunderbolts, which blaze and burn, terrify the shepherds, and do damage to the moral haystacks and thatch of small domestic pieties. He knocks all the domesticities about our ears with a blinding glare, appalling noise, and much smell of sulphur, stalking over the earth with the air of an infernal spirit. Shelley's poetry is like vivid sheet lightning, or the aurora, shedding strange illumination upon this lower world, yet a thing of the upper sky. The superstitious cross themselves in terror, and think that the end of the world has come; and even

re most weatherwise know only that some-
g done in the bosom of the ether, something
ens change.

poets of revolution, Shelley stirs us with
eyond the reaches of our souls," flinging into
ny of our lives new and terrible discords,
into yet unsounded keys, filling our hearts
l of "sad, perplexed minors," which yet have
oxicate us with the delirium of an agonizing
than any man of the century he challenges
es us with ethical paradoxes. His whole
ense with the eager, prophetic, forward-
rill of the modulating chord which leads
v movement. It is as if a great orchestra
assion of modern life had striven upward
ld climax, until at last this was reached in
sistent feminine shriek from the violins
to a terrible pitch. We feel that nothing
ter this but some such choral burst as the
oy" in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; and
ley's *Prometheus* is more truly the poetical
this great symphony than Goethe's *Faust*,
ier compares with it. The "Song of Joy"
e prophetic strains of the last act, in which
hear the first breath of the rushing mighty
new Pentecost, before which dogmas and
y with age and evil shall be blown away like
ves.

something weird and strange in his person-

which seems to place Shelley in the rank of angelic existences, rather than of ordinary men. His very appearance, as described by those who knew him, gives one the idea of a being of some upper sphere who had got astray upon the earth. His small head, with its bright curls, and starlike blue eyes eagerly gazing into infinity, seemed to be bent forward by the wind of his spirit, which drove him before it perpetually. The graceful awkwardness of his gait must have been like that of a creature accustomed to flying, which had lost its wings or foregone their use—a Botticellian angel just alit, and feeling the rough earth strange walking for feet whose wont it was to "trample the dim winds."

Whatever we may think of the particular facts of his life, as a whole it gives us a feeling that he could not have been very different from what he was. He was one of those exceptional men who are "a law unto themselves," who come into the world with a clear commission to do a certain work, be it good or evil according to the notions of ordinary men, and who, having accomplished this work, disappear. He was a missionary spirit, with an intense belief in his mission; the wind of inspiration was on him from his birth. He had none of the falterings or misgivings, though he was not free from the half-visions, of weaker or more complex natures. He rushes ahead in the van of the forlorn hope of the world, chanting his shrill cry of revolution, thinking to shatter the very gates of hell with the monotonous persistence of this lark-song of his, which flutters round two notes—liberty and love.

How are we to apply the canons of our prosaic morality to this half-feminine Lucifer, newly fallen from heaven? How are we to judge of words and actions, so shockingly immoral according to ordinary standards, said and done with such childlike innocence? For the great power of Shelley lies in his childlike simplicity; his song is childlike, rather than feminine. It has none of the gasps and sobs and broken music of Mrs. Browning's. It is sustained and thrilling as the high soprano of the "blessed boys" in the mystical scene which closes the second part of *Faust*. His actions have something of the beautiful unaccountableness of those of Goethe's Mignon. Like her, he is a creature of impulse; but what is terrible in him is that, unlike her, he, in true masculine fashion, converts his impulses into principles, and straightway proceeds to force the world to acknowledge their dominion. All his poetry is electric with that "passion for reforming the world" which so strongly possessed him. He is the idealist of a new society, different from that based upon the Protestantism of the Reformation, of which Spenser was the Utopian dreamer; and it is interesting to contrast the calm and measured character of the Utopianism of Spenser with the fervour and boundless aspiration of Shelley's. Spenser sings his tranquil song concerning the twelve moral virtues, giving to each virtue its several book of twelve cantos, neither more nor less. Shelley ravishes us away, in a whirlwind of passion, into a region where the moral virtues appear to us much as small garden-plots might appear to Elijah in his fiery

chariot. If Spenser knows anything of liberty, it must be the liberty of perfect law—a perfection attainable through care and self-regulating culture. If Shelley knows anything of law, it must be the perfect law of liberty—a law whose fulfilment is love. Each is the votary of a complementary truth ; but the moral Spenser saps our morality with his voluptuous pictures of sweet sin, the immoral Shelley fills our hearts with the passion of purity.

Miss Blind, in her suggestive paper in the *Westminster Review* for July, 1870, has, with some justice, protested against the tendency of modern criticism to make an arbitrary distinction between the realms of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. "What would become of the Beautiful," she asks, "if, securely dammed up against the influx of moral convictions and the speculations and discoveries of the reasoning faculties, it were subsisting in profound isolation only in and through itself?" What, we may answer, does actually and invariably become of the Beautiful under such circumstances? Simply that it dwindles and dies, or, at least, lives with a stunted and morbid life. Goethe's great axiom, "Art for art's sake," as popularly understood, is the very gospel of academic dilettantism—implying, as it does, the divorce of art from the healthy interests of life. Granting that it is the form, not the matter, the quality of the expression, not the thing expressed, which constitutes the art element in the work of art, does it follow that the quality of the thing expressed has nothing to do with the total value of this work of art? It may be

true that the essence of art is the emotional expression of emotion; yet the value of the work of art must surely in some degree depend upon the quality of the emotion thus expressed. Style may be the incarnation of this emotional expression; yet the artist who lives in his studio, and makes style his main object, cuts off the spiritual fountain-head which gives his style vitality. In all art, however free from the self-consciously didactic, there are, underlying and permeating the purely artistic element, ethical and philosophical elements derived from the moral and truth-grasping personality of the man; and these cannot rightly be ignored in estimating the final value of his work.

To the poet, the asceticism for art's sake which would drive him from the free air of the every-day world, to become a confectioner of æsthetic *Rahat-lacoum*, is especially fatal. Shelley, while early abandoning the self-consciously didactic in poetry, and expressing his abhorrence of it, never, or scarcely ever, becomes academic—never degenerates from a man into a mere poet. The cant of the present day about "art" and "the artist" would have sounded in his ears like the babbling of fools. He is the great poet that he is, and that Keats, with all his splendid gift of imagination and all his consummate perfection of style, had not yet become, precisely because he is full of the new wine of modern ethical ideas. Keats, though no mere artist, as he is falsely accused of being, had at least this characteristic of the artist in him, that his first craving was for sensuous beauty, and his first deliberate effort for

the perfection of his style. Shelley, on the other hand, is, above all things, a prophet with an authentic message to deliver. He hurled this spiritual message into words, and left his style to perfect itself in the process of its incarnation.

Shelley, as we shall see when we come to study the *Prometheus*, was in his loftiest moods a great mythopoet; his myths being the modern equivalent of the intellectual myths of the Greek mythology and of Plato—myths such as Goethe has attempted to handle in the second part of *Faust*, and Keats in *Endymion* and *Hyperion*. But if in mere mythological method Shelley approaches the Greeks, in the philosophy which his mythology embodies there is an element very far removed from anything Greek—an element essentially modern and, paradoxical as it may appear, Christian. Now that the dogmatic shell of the Christian idea is shattered, like the glass case of Goethe's Homunculus, its vital spirit has become a free practical force, silently and powerfully working for the regeneration of society; and Shelley's poetical sheet lightning is like that "fiery wonder" spread over the sea when the new Eros, formerly Homunculus, bursts from his prison to pour himself in rapture around Galatea's feet. In Shelley the Renaissance ends; righteousness and truth have kissed each other; that fusion of Hebraism and Hellenism for which Mr. Matthew Arnold sighs has fairly begun, and more than begun; the modern spirit has devoured antiquity, and lives with an ideal life of its own. He is like his own Spirit of the Earth—a child

full of the youth of the world. He "brings with him hope and forward-looking thoughts."

It is not my intention in this chapter to dwell on the details of Shelley's life—to tell again the well-known anecdotes, or to enter upon the question of the propriety of his conduct on various occasions. The evidence with regard to his separation from Harriett is still too incomplete to enable us to pronounce him guilty or not guilty of neglect or want of proper consideration for her feelings or interests; and this, and other cases in which he deviated from the beaten track of the morality of his day, may safely be left in the hands of his biographers, who have already fairly and fully dealt with them. As regards the general features of his character, I cannot do better than make an extract from the estimate of it, at once sympathetic and just, given by Mr. Symonds in his admirable sketch of his life, in the *English Men of Letters* series :—

"Shelley had no faculty for compromise, no perception of the blended truths and falsehoods through which the mind of man must gradually win its way from the obscurity of myths into the clearness of positive knowledge, for ever toiling and for ever foiled, and forced to content itself with the increasing consciousness of limitations. Brimming over with love for men, he was deficient in sympathy with the conditions under which they actually think and feel. Could he but dethrone the Anarch Custom, the millennium, he argued, would immediately arrive; nor did he stop to think how different was the fibre of his own soul from that of the

unnumbered multitudes around him. In his adoration of what he recognized as living, he retained no reverence for the ossified experience of past ages. The principle of evolution, which forms a saving link between the obsolete and the organically vital, had no place in his logic. The spirit of the French Revolution, uncompromising, shattering, eager to build in a day the structure which long centuries of growth must fashion, was still fresh upon him. We who have survived the enthusiasms of that epoch, who are exhausted with its passions, and who have suffered from its reactive impulses, can scarcely comprehend the vivid faith and young-eyed joy of aspiration which sustained Shelley in his flight toward the region of impossible ideals. For he had a vital faith; and this faith made the ideals he conceived seem possible—faith in the duty and desirability of overthrowing idols; faith in the gospel of liberty, fraternity, equality; faith in the divine beauty of nature; faith in a love that rules the universe; faith in the perfectibility of man; faith in the omnipresent soul, whereof our souls are atoms; faith in affection as the ruling and co-ordinating substance of morality. The man who lived by this faith was in no vulgar sense of the word an atheist. . . . Shelley believed too much to be consistently agnostic. He believed so firmly and intensely in his own religion—a kind of passionate positivism, a creed which seemed to have no God because it was all God—that he felt convinced he only needed to destroy accepted figments, for the light which blazed around him to break through and flood the

world with beauty." The strength and weakness of his character are thus assayed: "He lacked the touchstone of mature philosophy, whereby to separate the pinchbeck from the gold of social usage; and in his intense enthusiasm he lost his hold on common sense, which might have saved him from the puerility of arrogant iconoclasm. The positive side of his creed remains precious, not because it was logical, or scientific, or coherent, but because it was an ideal, fervently felt, and penetrated with the whole life-force of an incomparable nature. Such ideals are needed for sustaining man upon his path amid the glooms and shadows of impenetrable ignorance. They form the seal and pledge of his spiritual dignity, reminding him that he was not born to live like brutes, or like the brutes to perish without effort."

All this is very well put, and may serve as an introduction to what I shall venture to say about Shelley's religion, well aware, as I am, that to seek to fathom in thought and express in words a mystery so subtle, is to attempt to win the secret of its fragrance from some delicate flower by the coarse processes of chemical analysis. As he himself says, "We cannot express our deepest thoughts: they are incomprehensible even to ourselves." How much more so, then, must they be to others! Yet it is the business of the critic to seize and concentrate such wafts of these ethereal essences as he can apprehend; and something vital may distil over from his alembic to reward his pains.

Religion is a twofold property or affection of the

mind. It has its logical phase in the dogmatic creed which a man holds, or believes he holds; and its imaginative phase, which more or less distinctly emanates from or clings around this creed. Frequently it is hard for outsiders to perceive any very definite relation between the two; yet there is in every man's mind a constant interplay between ideality and fact, between imagination and reason, between his conception of what ought to be and his knowledge of what is. To draw any arbitrary line of demarcation between the two regions of ideality and fact is impossible; to differentiate between reason and imagination as between two faculties, absurd. The feet with which reason walks are themselves the wings of imagination, painfully furled for slow progress along the narrow path of certainty; and our deepest and highest life ranges through the abysses of the unknown on the wings of imagination, not over the firm ground of knowledge on the feet of reason. The mind has its little sphere of reality floating in the boundless ether of ideality. This sphere is itself, perhaps, but inspissated air—a concentration of that nebulous stuff of which dreams are made. In any case, it is as impossible for the soul to live in a skyless earth or an earthless sky, as it is to say where sky ceases and earth begins. We may burrow as we please in what we deem the solid earth of fact; the ether pursues us still, and permeates every atom-space as we dissect and analyze. Few of us are so stern in our fidelity to truths of reason that we are content to abandon the airy regions of the imagination, where pleasant delusions abound, no doubt,

but whence we may often descry new plots of solid truth slowly orbing out of the domain of nebulous hypothesis. Pure science advances by means of hypotheses, and every hypothesis involves an act of imagination, in which the man of science may be said to become for the moment a poet—the distinction between the pure man of science and the true poet being that, while the man of science makes but short excursions from the region of certainty, and esteems nothing true that cannot be verified in the region of observed fact, the poet exhausts the sphere of possible ideas to create from their combination an ideal which corresponds more or less remotely with observed facts. The region of poetry is emphatically the region of the unverifiable by the methods of pure science, and yet it cannot be called a region of falsehood; it is rather a region in which truths half apprehended loom dimly around truths seen in intensest vision, in which the actual and the possible enter into the closest relationship, until the actual seems but a link in the chain of possibilities, and the possible seems half actual. The imagination seizes upon the subtlest hints conveyed through the senses, the most delicate movements of desire, on all that the reason rejects as too impalpable for its chain of evidence, to build the soul a home whose foundations may be fixed upon solid fact, while its pinnacles and towers reach upward into the sky of the ideal.

"Everything possible to be believed," says Blake, "is an image of truth;" and the imagination has its visions which are believable, as well as those which are

not. The former may be called truths of the imagination, which, when verified in the world of fact, become truths of the reason, and, even when unverifiable, may be images of truth; the latter are but phantasies, the playthings of the mind. Truths of the imagination may, then, be scientific hypotheses, or they may be types of things actual, as are the characters created by a dramatist; they may be myths which body forth things but vaguely apprehended by the senses, or they may be ideals to be realized in some future circumstances. The two latter classes of truths of the imagination belong to the province of religion, and their value depends upon the probability of their being truths, or images of truths, of fact. For some men the validity of such truths of imagination is unquestionable. Their faith in the intuitions of their imagination far exceeds in fervour of conviction the calm conclusions of the man of science. For others, the smallest deviation from the path of strict logical deduction is made with doubt and fear and trembling self-questioning. Of the first class of minds, the class to whom this phenomenal world appears but as the veil or garment through which the eternal world shines, Blake, the mystical poet, is a supreme type. Of the second, the class for whom the phenomenal world is an ill-regulated piece of machinery driven by some unintelligible force, John Stuart Mill, the white-souled saint of pure reason, is the best possible example for our present purpose. For Mill, like Blake, is an eminently religious nature; the destiny of humanity, and its relation to the deep things of the

universe, are always anxiously before his mind. For Blake, the imagination is the light of the body—he looks "through not with the eye;" the five senses are closed gates which the imagination only can open. For Mill, the imagination is a dreamer, a juggling sorcerer, who gives us drugs to deaden the pain of life, or stimulants to increase its flagging energy, which we may take, indeed, but should take cautiously. No two men ever gazed more fixedly from opposite points upon the golden and silver sides of truth than these two. "Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so make it so?" asks Blake of the Prophet Isaiah, who replies: "All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains: but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything." Mill would have smiled sorrowfully over this as a piece of metaphorical exaggeration, and proceeded to demonstrate to Blake, with what that seer in one of his *Memorable Fancies* calls "a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning," that even the Creator himself is incapable of carrying out his intentions at all adequately—the laws of matter and force being too strong for him. The ethical principles of the two men are as diverse as their philosophies. For Blake, the gratification of desire is morality, impulse is the infallible voice of God. "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires." "I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse." For Mill, a far-calculating prudence, a deliberate self-culture and self-restraint, are

the strait gate through which every man must enter the paradise of the religion of humanity, in which the self-regarding virtues, regenerated by their complete permeation with social instincts, tend spontaneously to evolve the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Between these two men, who stand at opposite poles as thinkers, Shelley occupies an intermediate position. With a faith in the truths of his imagination, almost as fervid and much more practical than Blake's, he never lost sight of the necessity for a rational basis for his beliefs, though he was very far from subjecting these beliefs to the stern scrutiny to which Mill subjected his. The main difference between his own faith and that "faith the obscene worm" which was his abhorrence, was that it had its root in no traditional authority, but in the intuitions of his imagination.

It may be doubted whether the mind of man will ever completely win its way through that region of "blended truths and falsehoods" of which Mr. Symonds speaks, "from the obscurity of myths into the clearness of positive knowledge;" and the epithet "passionate positivism" which he applies to the religion of Shelley would seem more appropriate as applied to that of Mill. With all his ardour for positive truth, with all his love of free discussion, Shelley remained rather a dialectician occupied with ideas, than a scientific philosopher eager in the pursuit and systematization of facts; and this he was, not merely from temperament, but from the circumstances of his age, in which the somewhat shallow and limited generalizations of eighteenth-century philosophy

were floating in the air, the positive science of our own time being still in its infancy. Life then seemed to be a comparatively simple thing. The enormous complexity of the processes by which the slow evolution of the human race is produced was not even dreamed of. The very vagueness of men's perception of the facts of human life left scope for conceptions which were anything but vague, being precise and definite in proportion to their inadequacy. The terrible hiatus between what is and what we feel ought to be, the sense of which gives such a tragic tone to Mill's Nature-philosophy, is felt indeed by Shelley, but felt much less deeply. For him the fact that whatever is is wrong, regarded from one ideal standpoint, is merely a step towards the conclusion that whatever is is right, from another ideal standpoint. For him the heart of Nature is essentially good and right; our sins have separated us from her, but we have only to cleanse our wills by the inspiration of love, to turn to the ideal and live, and Nature will take us back once more to her blissful maternal bosom, and be regenerated in our regeneration. That "consciousness of limitations," of which Mr. Symonds speaks, was scarcely felt by Shelley, and felt only as an artificial bondage, which the spirit of man had imposed upon itself and could rend away at will. He had no sense of what Mill calls "the niggardliness of Nature;" hence his angry rejection of the population-theory of Malthus. For him, the feeding of the ten thousand with a few loaves and fishes was but a mythical presentment of what the "chemical science" of the future was to accomplish for mankind.

Shelley's religion, like the philosophy of which it was the spirit, was from the first transcendental rather than positive, and though he never attained to a consistent transcendental philosophy, it is pretty evident that the tendency of his mind was more and more in the direction of a definitely pantheistic system. Beneath the quasi-materialism of his youth and the cautious scepticism of his maturer years, his faith in the reality of a world of spirit behind the world of sense burnt on unquenchably —a faith which, however, as no one knew better than himself, lived upon revelations which flowed in upon him through channels more delicate than those through which the nutriment of our positive knowledge painfully distils. Hence the wide distinction between the visions of divine things contained in his poetry and the direct statements as to his creed contained in his prose writings, or reported to have been expressed by him in conversation. "He was an agnostic," says Mr. Symonds, "only in so far as he proclaimed the impossibility of solving the insoluble and knowing the unknowable."

Mr. Rossetti, in the careful summing up of Shelley's opinions on various important subjects, which is to be found at the end of the memoir prefixed to his edition of the poems, has very well epitomized what may be called Shelley's creed—that is to say, that portion of his belief which he himself regarded as having a sound rational basis—as to the existence and nature of God, and the immortality of the soul. This summary gives only the prosaic side of his religion, the residuum left when all deductions had been made on the

ground of uncertainty ; it does not represent the atmosphere of faith in which he lived, moved, and had his being. It is superfluous to add anything to what has already been said by various biographers and critics on the subject of Shelley's nominal atheism. This, as is perfectly evident to every student of his works, was merely a polemic against the popular theology ; the fact that where he uses the term *God* he usually does so in a narrow theological sense, of course affords no presumption against his holding a philosophical creed amounting to some form of pantheism or theism. This Mr. Rossetti makes very clear, and cites one or two remarkable passages in which he uses the word *God* in the deeper sense of that soul of the universe in which he believed. The most remarkable instance of this use of the word, which occurs in the *Prometheus*, he has somehow inadvertently passed over. In the scene in which Asia stands before the throne of Demogorgon, that mysterious personage—who is a sort of incarnation of darkness visible, a type of the mystery which surrounds the ultimate truths of the universe—in replying to her eager inquiries into these truths, half disdainfully uses the word *God* in the sense of an almighty and merciful Creator ; but when she further asks—

"Whom call'dst thou God?"

he replies—

"I spoke but as ye speak,
For Jove is the supreme of living things."

The inmost mystery of the universe is unknowable.

God in his pure essence is beyond the sphere of our consciousness, and even of our conception.

"The deep truth is imageless."

Shelley's subtle intellect delighted in the thought that behind the universal mind, behind even that life of its life which he calls spirit, there was some more recondite principle, some more essential substance, the nature of which we cannot imagine or find a name for. "Mind cannot create—it can only perceive," was a favourite axiom of his; and he further anticipates a doctrine which is familiar enough to us in recent speculation. "It is infinitely improbable that the cause of mind—that is, of existence—is similar to mind." This pregnant utterance would be heartily echoed by the materialists of the present day; but Shelley is a pure transcendentalist in his view as to this basis of mind. He does not, like them, regard mind as a mere function of organized matter, and still less does he advance to the further conception that the conscious in nature is conditioned by the unconscious, the higher by the lower. His transcendental substance is much like the pure Being of the Germans, and in the passage just quoted he identifies mind with existence, thus giving us a hint of a philosophy which perhaps resembles the second, semi-mystical phase of Fichte's more than that of any other philosopher. The unknowable "almighty God" of Demogorgon's speech seems to correspond to the pure Being of Fichte, and what Shelley calls mind or existence, to what Fichte also calls existence. Each particular mind is but a wavelet on this sea of universal

mind, and the phenomenal universe arises from the perceptions which stream in upon the particular mind from that universal mind of which it is itself a part. Some such speculative doctrine as this appears to have been vaguely looming before Shelley in the later years of his life; but he had the good sense to regard it as a purely speculative doctrine, provisional and representative, and not as a logically developed scheme of absolute truth, as Fichte regarded his system.

Had Shelley been asked, in the course of conversation, whether he believed in God, his reply might very well have taken the form of Faust's to Gretchen:

> Wer darf ihn nennen?
> Und wer bekennen:
> Ich glaub' ihn.
> Wer empfinden
> Und sich unterwinden
> Zu sagen: ich glaub' ihn nicht?
> * * * * *
> Wenn du ganz in dem Gefühle selig bist,
> Nenn' es dann, wie du willst,
> Nenn's Glück! Herz! Liebe! Gott!
> Ich habe keinen Namen
> Dafür! Gefühl ist alles;
> Name ist Schall und Rauch,
> Umnebelnd Himmelsgluth."

He lived in this glow of heaven, conscious of the perpetual presence with him of a Spirit of divine Beauty and Love, whose he was and whom he served. His sceptical intellect might ask whether there were indeed any such spirit as an objective fact of nature, or whether it was but the reflection of his own personality

upon the dark background of the unknown. To his imagination the conception of this spirit was a vital truth. He was sustained by it, as the mystic is by the sense of his communion with God.

A personality such as Shelley's was only possible at the beginning of this century. His enthusiastic faith, his militant optimism, are impossible now for a thinker so subtle and an inquirer so fearless. The tendency of modern science, and the philosophy which springs from it, is not in the direction of jubilant optimism. That the Spirit of Nature is a Spirit of Love; that it gives the happiness, present or ultimate, of its creatures, brute or human, any supreme place in its design; that human intelligence can interfere in any important manner to hasten the slow progress of evolutional improvement—are all positions which now-a-days have to bear the brunt of the keenest adverse criticism. As long as the evils of the world, or any considerable portion of them, were looked upon as being primarily due to man's sin, to a demonstrable departure from the beneficent laws of nature, there seemed grounds for hope that, some time or another, man might learn these laws, and cease to sin against them. Now, although such a hope is by no means extinct, we have begun to feel the enormous complexity of life and its limitations. We have begun to feel clearly the tremendous force of that power of evil, or what we cannot help regarding as such in relation to human development, which St. Paul felt dimly when he spoke of our wrestling, "not against flesh and blood, but against

principalities and powers." With increased knowledge of the world we live in has undoubtedly come increased power to make of this world what we desire it should be, but also an immensely increased sense of the counteracting influences which tend to prevent our ever attaining to any very perfect realization of our dreams of what should be. It is not merely that we are ignorant; that our desires are conflicting and our ideals unstable; that our visionary Tower of Babel of human perfection, which is to rise to heaven, is the scene of perpetual confusion of tongues, and strife among the builders. It is that good and evil themselves seem so inextricably interwoven, that we find it difficult to separate them even in idea, much less in fact; that the "something not ourselves which makes for *un*-righteousness" seems to be as necessary a resultant of the forces of life as that which makes for righteousness, and as little capable of elimination. It would seem, indeed, that the more we learn of nature, the more difficult does it become to justify the ways of God to man by any system of natural theology. The most that can be said is that the "Nature" of modern philosophy, though scarcely less enormously unjust than the God of Calvinistic theology, is indifferent rather than capriciously malignant, and that mankind is less utterly helpless in her hands. It is curious to contrast the views of nature taken by Blake, Shelley, and John Stuart Mill respectively. For Blake, the mystic, "vegetable nature" was theoretically the work of Satan, just as it was for the old Puritans, though for an exactly oppo-

site reason—because it restrained, not because it provoked desire. His Satan was the jealous god of reason, the restrainer, who has shut the soul into the cavern of the flesh, leaving it only the five senses for gates, through which the infinite entering becomes finite. Yet this does not prevent him from proclaiming that "everything that lives is holy." Good and evil, the antagonistic forces, are mutually necessary; their strife gives rise to the natural, their reconciliation to the supernatural or ideal world, and through the natural we may behold the supernatural and live in its light. For Shelley, the pantheist, nature included what was for Blake supernatural—the divine ideal; and, accordingly, while Blake's imagination occupies itself primarily with a present eternal life above the world of sense, and but secondarily with a future regenerated earth, Shelley's occupies itself primarily with a regenerated earth, and secondarily with eternal life. For Mill, the positive philosopher, who endeavours to base every conception upon observed facts, not intuitions, nature is, or may be, the imperfect handiwork of a being of tolerably good intentions, but limited power, who works under restrictions, the nature of which we have no means of knowing. Mill feels, like Blake, the limitations of nature, and thus expresses in the language of prose something of what Blake has poetically expressed in his account of the strife between his Titans and the jealous god Urizen. Shelley's myth of Prometheus and Jupiter is analogous, but not the same in its scope.

As Shelley represents the comfortable optimism of

his time, Mill represents the decidedly uncomfortable positivism of our own age—a philosophy which, while not absolutely pessimistic, is upheld above despair by a hope which seems but pale and weak beside that of Shelley. Between Mill and Shelley there are deeper points of resemblance than might at first sight appear. Mill may almost be called a prose Shelley, having something of the same simple, intense ethical nature, though with a more circumscribed intellect. Like Shelley, he is eager and undaunted in his search for truth, with a childlike singleness of purpose and a feminine teachableness. Like Shelley, too, the bare thought of injustice fills him with a white heat of indignant rage, which almost takes away his reason. There is something of the shrill cry of Shelley in the *Essay on Liberty*, and much of it in *The Subjection of Women*. Mill is like Mount Hecla—there is a volcanic heat of indignation concealed under the snowy surface of his logic. Like Shelley, he is full of the enthusiasm of humanity, the passion for reforming the world, but born at a time when belief in the world's rapid regeneration by the purest reason or the sublimest enthusiasm, sown broadcast among mankind, is impossible. Hence, while the great characteristic of Shelley is his eager recklessness of energy, that fervour of a spirit which transforms impulses into principles; that of Mill is his stern conscientiousness in the pursuit of truth—that candour of soul which makes truth the most attractive thing, though it be but another name for despair.

In these two men, Shelley and Mill, the spirit of

English idealism in the nineteenth century finds a typical expression. From the lips of both we hear the bitter cry of humanity, "I want!" but while with Shelley the want is an earnest of its own satisfaction, with Mill it is not so. Nature is a niggardly stepmother, who gives only enough of a good thing to make us wish for more—if, indeed, she give us even this. We desire immortality, and think the desire an earnest of its own satisfaction. That is to say, we desire boundless life. Well, we have life, such as it is, but not the boundless life which we desire; just as we have a supply of food, limited but not boundless.

"Reason deceives us," says Vauvenargues, "more often than does nature;" and it seems probable that those instincts, desires, and intuitions of which Mill, walking as he deems in the *lumen siccum* of reason, speaks so contemptuously, contribute more to our total faculty for discovering truth than he perceives. Indeed, it is impossible for the strictest reasoner, once he leaves the realm of a pure science, such as mathematics, in which all depends upon arbitrary conceptions which have no existence except in thought, to escape from their influence. Into every so-called fact of science imagination enters; and Mill's theory of the universe is as much a product of imagination as Shelley's. Contradictory as they at first sight appear, both are images of truth—such portions of a wider truth as the mind of each could reflect. Neither can be esteemed more than a most imperfect vision of the great mystery into which the two men gaze.

Whether we shall ever attain to a reconciliation between the ideal and the real, between what is and what ought to be; whether that sublimest vision of the imagination, the holy, just, and pure God, after whom the soul pants as the hart after the waterbrooks, before whom we desire to come and appear, that we may be judged in righteousness, shall ever be made manifest as a truth of the reason; whether that hope of a fuller life beyond the grave, which has been to many as wings lifting them above the troubled waters of life, and to many the condition of a possible solution of the riddle of the world, shall ever pass from the realm of faith to the realm of ascertained fact—are questions which we cannot answer now. Meanwhile Shelley marks the highest point which the flood-tide of human aspiration has reached in the present century. A faith such as his is a miracle-working power even in the real world; it makes the impossible possible. The poet who creates a new ideal, and fills men's hearts with the flame of a divine desire, is a practical force in the stream of human development—and this Shelley has done. So much of his poetry is full of the tender melancholy of the moonlight he loved, that the world is still half blind to his highest bardic character, as the poet of a spiritual dawn, the eager spirit who flies forward—

> "Calling the lapsèd soul,
> And weeping in the morning dew."

Even his moonlight seems to reflect the beams of some yet unrisen sun; and his sunlight has all the ethereal exhilaration of that of the first hours of a glorious day.

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CHAPTER II.

EARLIEST WORKS—"QUEEN MAB"—"ALASTOR."

Earliest Works.

Of Shelley's earliest attempts in prose and verse, little more can be said than that they show a certain volubility of expression which may be regarded as an earnest of the wonderful productiveness of his later life. There is a weird precocity in knowledge of the world in some of the *Verses on a Cat*, said to be written when he was about eight years old, which is very unlike the innocent unworldliness of the mature Shelley :

> "Some a living require,
> And others desire
> An old fellow out of the way;
> And which is the best
> I leave to be guessed,
> For I cannot pretend to say."

The novels *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are really not bad, taken as burlesques on the blood-and-thunder school of romantic novelists. They read like the productions of a romantic school-girl in the "Sturm und

Drang," consequent upon a course of Mrs. Radcliffe. Something of the chaotic impossibility of their plots is reproduced in *Laon and Cythna;* but in that poem the jejune horrors of the novels give place to something genuinely imaginative, while the feeling for beauty of natural scenery has developed enormously. Both novels are, of course, full of stilted sentiment, and both contain many exquisite pieces of bathos, such as that description of Matilda's being borne away to the torture, in *Zastrozzi:* "Her dishevelled ringlets floated in negligent luxuriance over her alabaster bosom; her eyes, the contemptuous glance of which had now given way to a confused expression of alarm, were almost closed; and her symmetrical form, as borne away by the four officials, looked interestingly lovely." Or these bits from *St. Irvyne:* "Time fled, and each succeeding day inured Wolfstein more and more to the idea of depriving his fellow-creatures of their possessions. In a short space of time, the high-souled and noble Wolfstein, though still high-souled and noble, became an experienced bandit."

"Cavigni quaffed the liquor to the dregs!—the cup fell from his trembling hand. The chill dew of death sat upon his forehead: in terrific convulsions, he fell headlong; and, inarticulately uttering, 'I am poisoned,' sank seemingly lifeless on the earth. Sixty robbers at once rushed forward to raise him; and, reclining in their arms, with a horrible and harrowing shriek, the spark of life fled from his body for ever."

There is, on the other hand, some dawn of real

imagination in Ginotti's vision of sin, in *St. Irvyne:* "I dreamed that I stood on the brink of a most terrific precipice, far, far above the clouds, amid whose dark forms which lowered beneath was seen the dashing of a stupendous cataract: its roarings were borne to mine ear by the blast of night. Above me rose, fearfully embattled and rugged, fragments of enormous rocks, tinged by the dimly gleaming moon; their loftiness, the grandeur of their misshapen proportions, and their bulk staggering the imagination; and scarcely could the mind itself scale the vast loftiness of their aerial summits. I saw the dark clouds pass by, borne by the impetuosity of the blast, yet felt no wind myself. Methought darkly gleaming forms rode on their almost palpable prominences.

"Whilst thus I stood, gazing on the expansive gulf which yawned before me, methought a silver sound stole on the quietude of night. The moon became as bright as polished silver, and each star sparkled with scintillations of inexpressible whiteness. Pleasing images stole imperceptibly upon my senses, when a ravishingly sweet strain of dulcet melody seemed to float around. Now it was wafted nearer, and now it died away in tones to melancholy dear. Whilst I thus stood enraptured, louder swelled the strain of seraphic harmony; it vibrated on my inmost soul, and a mysterious softness lulled each impetuous passion to repose. I gazed in eager anticipation of curiosity on the scene before me; for a mist of silver radiance rendered every object but myself imperceptible; yet was it brilliant as the noon-

day sun. Suddenly, whilst yet the full strains swelled along the empyrean sky, the mist in one place seemed to dispart, and through it to roll clouds of deepest crimson. Above them, and seemingly reclining on the viewless air, was a form of most exact and superior symmetry. Rays of brilliancy, surpassing expression, fell from his burning eye, and the emanations from his countenance tinted the transparent clouds below with silver light. The phantasm advanced towards me; it seemed then, to my imagination, that his figure was borne on the sweet strain of music which filled the circumambient air. In a voice which was fascination itself, the being addressed me, saying, 'Wilt thou come with me? wilt thou be mine?'"

This passage, though disfigured by some commonplace phrases, has a certain picturesque grandiosity of conception, and is not deficient in rhythmical music. It is, at least, remarkable for a boy of seventeen.

What is most important in these novels is, as Mr. Rossetti has pointed out, the light they throw upon the author's religious opinions and ethical tendencies; and while we find him still pretty orthodox in his notions as to the evil results of atheism, we find him drifting in the direction of lax conceptions as regards the sanctity of the marriage tie. The following passage from *St. Irvyne*, in which two of his good characters are the speakers, is interesting, taken in connection with his own subsequent conduct:—

"'Eloise,' continued Fitzeustace, 'I know I ought not to grieve; but you will, perhaps, pardon me when

I say that a father's curse, whether from the prejudice of education or the innate consciousness of its horror, agitates my mind. . . . Before we go to England, before my father will see us, it is necessary that we should be married—— Nay, do not start, Eloise; I view it in the light that you do: I consider it a human institution, and incapable of furnishing that bond of union by which alone can intellect be conjoined; I regard it as but a chain, which, although it keeps the body bound, still leaves the soul unfettered: it is not so with love. But still, Eloise, to those who think like us, it is, at all events, harmless; it is but yielding to the prejudices of the world wherein we live, and procuring moral expediency, at a slight sacrifice of what we conceive to be right.'

"'Well, well, it shall be done, Fitzeustace,' resumed Eloise; 'but take the assurance of *my* promise that I cannot love you more.'

"They soon agreed on a point of, in their eyes, so trifling importance, and arriving in England, tasted that happiness which love and innocence alone can give."

The juvenile poems, written at about the same time as these novels, are for the most part weak reflexes of the eighteenth century didactic, romantic, and sentimental styles, as found in the works of Cowper, Lewis, Hayley, etc.; yet even in these early poems there is an ethical atmosphere which we feel to be dimly Shelleyan. Such a piece of irregular blank verse as *The Spectral Horseman*, and some other fragments, show us Shelley's soul in its first phase of organization—like an ill-tuned

Æolian harp, pouring forth a weird and unformed music at the touch of every wind of emotion, before it had become fashioned into a perfect violin, delicate indeed, yet capable of bearing the intensest strain of our terrible modern pitch.

Even in the *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* we meet with a line here and there which arrests us, amid the blank monotony of its fellows, with a foretaste of music in its voice.

> "I pondered on the woes of lost mankind,
> I pondered on the ceaseless rage of kings."

There is a still solemnity in these lines not altogether eclipsed by the pseudo-sublimity of the context. The opening lines of the poem entitled *Despair* are also good, for their melancholy music:

> "And canst thou mock mine agony, thus calm
> In cloudless radiance, Queen of silver night?"

A few passages recall Blake, who was Shelley's true predecessor.

> "And I see Satan stalk athwart the plain;
> He hastes along the burning soil of hell.
> Welcome, thou despot, to my dark domain!"

This might serve as a motto for one of his designs exhibited in London not long since. The lines—

> "Can the fierce night-fiends rest on yonder hill,
> And, in the eternal mansions of the sky,
> Can the directors of the storm in powerless silence lie?"

which occur in one of the stanzas of *Despair*, also have a certain Blakean aroma. On the other hand, the senti-

mental sing-song of Hayley is daintily echoed in this lyrical effusion :

> "And if any soft passion be near,
> Which mortals, frail mortals, can know,
> Let love shed on the bosom a tear,
> And dissolve the chill ice-drop of woe."

"QUEEN MAB."

Queen Mab, semi-vital as it is—a glimpse of a beautiful world still without form and void—is a most important work, as regards the chronological development of the poet's genius. In it we have his first serious endeavour to attain to a philosophy capable of serving as a basis for that "passion for reforming the world" which was the inspiration of his life. In it we first feel the intoxication of the ethereal atmosphere in which his pure and beautiful spirit dwells ; we are hurried forward with him in his eager flight after ideal truth and good. The chaotic subtlety of the poem renders it difficult of analysis within a narrow compass. It is a shifting quicksand of subtle thought, upon which it is impossible to raise any consistent philosophic superstructure, either atheistic or pantheistic. A consistent philosophy is, indeed, if one dare form an opinion, a somewhat rare phenomenon ; and though, out of courtesy to that wonderful dark-lantern, the human reason, we may credit a man here and there, a Hume or a Spinoza, with having attained to a system tolerably

capable of holding water, such a thing is scarcely to be expected from an ardent young man fresh from the perusal of Rousseau and Godwin. Shelley was a poet rather than a philosopher, a seer rather than a thinker, and even in *Queen Mab* we find him, like a celestial butterfly, sipping the unsatisfying honey of one system after another. Goethe said, when asked about his creed, "In philosophy I am a pantheist, in ethics a theist, in poetry a polytheist;" and Shelley might have said much the same, substituting atheist for theist, to express his abhorrence of the unjust and revengeful anthropomorphic God of popular religions:

> "Himself the creature of his worshippers,
> Whose names and attributes and passions change,
> Seeva, Buddh, Foh, Jehovah, God, or Lord,
> Even with the human dupes who build his shrines,
> Still serving o'er the war-polluted world
> For desolation's watchword."

In *Queen Mab* Shelley boldly rushes to grapple with the insoluble problems of life—the reconciliation of the existence of evil with a comfortable theory of the universe, and of man's free self-perfectionment with the rigid law of necessity. He here reproduces that incongruity between the doctrine of necessity and high moral enthusiasm which is so prominent in Godwin's *Political Justice*—the work of a strict necessitarian, who yet busies himself in an endeavour to utilize Necessity for a moral purpose. Shelley, like Godwin, is an optimist in his belief in the "perfectibility of man," whatever that may mean, but not an optimist in

the sense of practically believing that "whatever is is right," though to the Spirit of Nature, which is one with Necessity, evil and good are indifferent.

> "The slave
> Whose horrible lusts spread misery o'er the world,
> And the good man who lifts with virtuous pride
> His being, in the sight of happiness
> That springs from his own works; the poison-tree
> Beneath whose shade all life is withered up,
> And the fair oak whose leafy dome affords
> A temple where the vows of happy love
> Are registered, are equal in thy sight:
> * * * * *
> Because thou hast not human sense,
> Because thou art not human mind."

For the ordinary pantheist, God sees good and evil as one, because he sees deeper into the universe than man; for the author of this passage, it would seem that the Spirit of Nature can see no difference between them, because she has not human passions—a doctrine which negatively amounts to very nearly the same thing. In other passages we find this Spirit of Nature appealed to in passionate language, which implies that she is in some sense holy, and on the side of human happiness and purity. In his note on the Fairy's bold assertion, "There is no God!" the poet says, "This negation must be understood solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading spirit, co-eternal with the universe, remains unshaken." Yet we find in another note the strange assertion that we have absolutely no relation with this spirit. "Religion is the perception of the relation in which we stand to the principle of the

universe. But if the principle of the universe be not an organic being, the model and prototype of man, the relation between it and human beings is absolutely none." Here, even supposing the meaning to be merely that we can have no *moral* relations with a non-organic principle, the pantheistic conception vanishes, and we are plunged into practical atheism. How, indeed, this "Necessity," which is merely an abstract term, denoting the manner in which the phenomena produced by an unknown power are connected, can be synonymous with this power itself, and can be idealized by Godwin into a moral force called "reason," and by Shelley into a life-giving "Spirit," is not explained by either Shelley or Godwin, who, like other literary reformers, are somewhat given to word-conjuring and nostrum-mongering.

What is really valuable in *Queen Mab* is, not its philosophy, but its ethical passion—its rage against the injustice of the world, and its faith in the final triumph of right over wrong. The contrast between what man is and what he might be, is put with all the force of an impassioned rhetoric, which, strangely enough, often resembles that of one of the most orthodox of poets, Cowper, not only in spirit, but in form. Indeed, there was more similarity between the creeds of these very dissimilar men than at first sight appears—Shelley's necessitarianism corresponding to Cowper's Calvinistic predestination; his regenerating reason, or Spirit of Nature, to Cowper's regenerating Spirit of Truth. Many passages in which Shelley inveighs against tyranny,

luxury, fame, war, etc., might almost have been written by Cowper.

> "He passes on :
> The king, the wearer of a gilded chain
> That binds his soul to abjectness, the fool
> Whom courtiers nickname monarch, whilst a slave
> Even to the basest appetites."

This might almost be a quotation from the *Task*. Or this :

> "Many faint with toil,
> That few may know the cares and woe of sloth."

Cowper was, however, not sane enough to abjure the worship of that

> "Vengeful, pitiless, and almighty fiend,
> Whose mercy is a nickname for the rage
> Of tameless tigers hungering for blood."

The hell of his morbid imagination overwhelmed his gentle and timid spirit with a hopeless agony, very different from the "divine despair" of Shelley.

Both Cowper and Shelley look upon man as the one great discord in the harmony of creation; but while Cowper believes in the eternal condemnation of all mankind, in consequence of a condition of original sin, deep-seated and cureless, except in the case of the few elect saved through the miracle of redemption, Shelley regards the miseries of mankind as due to some comparatively trifling aberration from an aboriginal state of perfection, to which all are capable of once more attaining. This aberration he accounts for on the hypothesis that some mysterious abstraction called Custom produces concealment, which produces hypocrisy,

vice, and lust, which produce priests and kings, who in their turn produce all the evils of life.

"The universe
In Nature's silent eloquence declares
That all fulfil the works of love and joy—
All but the outcast, man. He fabricates
The sword which stabs his peace; he cherisheth
The snakes that gnaw his heart; he raiseth up
The tyrant whose delight is in his woe,
Whose sport is in his agony."

If the Calvinistic theologians exaggerate the corruption of human nature, Shelley errs on the other side, and takes too optimistic a view of the matter. It is to be feared that Nature is less solicitous about the happiness of mankind, the establishment of that

"Happy earth, reality of heaven,"

which constitutes the Shelleyan millennium, than the poet of *Queen Mab* represents her to be, and has more to do with those vices of birth and education which he attributes to priests and kings than he is willing to allow.

"Nature!—no!
Kings, priests, and statesmen, blast the human flower
Even in its tender bud. . . .
Let priest-led slaves cease to proclaim that man
Inherits vice and misery, when force
And falsehood hang even o'er the cradled babe,
Stifling with rudest grasp all natural good.
Ah! to the stranger soul, when first it peeps
From its new tenement, and looks abroad
For happiness and sympathy, how stern
And desolate a tract is this wide world!
. . . On its wretched frame,

Poison'd, perchance, by the disease and woe
Heap'd on the wretched parent whence it sprung,
By morals, law, and custom, the pure winds
Of heaven, that renovate the insect tribes,
May breathe not. The untainting light of day
May visit not its longings. It is bound
Ere it has life ; yea, all the chains are forged
Long ere its being."

Yet, as he tells us—

"Every heart contains perfection's germ."

Vice is a disease; we should, therefore, pity the criminal, and seek to cure him. "A necessarian is inconsequent to his own principles if he indulges in hatred or contempt; the compassion which he feels for the criminal is unmixed with a desire of injuring him." Even the poor tyrant is himself the victim of the tyrant custom. "Is it strange," he asks respecting a king—

"Is it strange
That this poor wretch should pride him in his woe,
Take pleasure in his abjectness, and hug
The scorpion that consumes him?
. . . No—'tis not strange.
He, like the vulgar, thinks, feels, acts, and lives
Just as his father did ; the unconquered powers
Of precedent and custom interpose
Between a king and virtue."

But when reason prevails, as it must and shall, the tyrants of mankind shall be overthrown ; the "twin-sister of religion, selfishness," shall die ; all men shall live in charity ; the universal spirit will "revivify this withered limb of heaven," and earth shall become—

"Of purest spirits a pure dwelling-place,
Symphonious with the planetary spheres;
When man, with changeless nature coalescing,
Will undertake regeneration's work,
When its ungenial poles no longer point
To the red and baleful sun
That faintly twinkles there."

Shelley's imagination was strongly possessed with the mystical doctrine that the whole creation, or at least our own little corner of it, "groaneth and travaileth" in the throes of a new birth, physical as well as spiritual; that the apparent blots on the scheme of creation are somehow connected with man's aberration, and shall disappear with his regeneration, which, as he gravely explains in a very scientific note, will coincide with a change in the direction of the earth's axis. The "red and baleful sun" is "the north polar star, to which the axis of the earth, in its present state of obliquity, points. It is exceedingly probable, from many considerations, that this obliquity will gradually diminish, until the equator coincides with the ecliptic; the nights and days will then become equal on the earth throughout the year, and probably the seasons also. There is no great extravagance in presuming that the progress of the perpendicularity of the poles may be as rapid as the progress of intellect; or that there should be a perfect identity between the moral and physical improvement of the human species."

When this beneficent change takes place, man will dwell, as a healthy vegetarian, in a "happy earth, reality of heaven;" the lion, following his vegetarian example,

will "eat straw like the ox," and poisonous things will cease to poison.

> "The lion now forgets to thirst for blood:
> There might you see him sporting in the sun
> Beside the dreadless kid; his claws are sheathed,
> His teeth are harmless, custom's force has made
> His nature as the nature of a lamb.
> Like passion's fruit, the nightshade's tempting bane
> Poisons no more the pleasure it bestows:
> All bitterness is past; the cup of joy
> Unmingled mantles to the goblet's brim,
> And courts the thirsty lips it fled before."

It is strange to find these world-old dreams giving colour and flavour to the rather crude and watery new wine of the modern spirit. We can scarcely tell, indeed, whether we have here new wine in old bottles or old wine in new bottles. It is very pleasant, no doubt, to find the smack of brimstone so much less perceptible in this new vintage—very pleasant to find that, so far from being utterly corrupt, we all contain "perfection's germ," and that, instead of painfully mortifying the flesh, and "striving upward, working out the beast," all we have to do is to fling off the fig-leaf of custom and dance naked in a miraculously restored Paradise; but it seems too pleasant to be true. "Damn braces, bless relaxes!" is Shelley's cry, like Blake's; and there is a delicious innocence about his dream of free-love, through which, as he very plausibly argues in the notes, by merely getting rid of marriage prostitution would cease of itself. Blake's aphorism, "Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of religion," also finds its

counterpart in this last section of the poem. On the other hand, the fourth and fifth sections, which describe the evils of the present condition of the world, contain some very striking passages of indignant eloquence. Military glory he regarded with unmitigated abhorrence, Cowper himself never inveighed against war more vehemently.

> "War is the statesman's game, the priest's delight,
> The lawyer's jest, the hired assassin's trade,
> And to those royal murderers, whose mean thrones
> Are bought by crimes of treachery and gore,
> The bread they eat, the staff on which they lean."

The soldiers who serve in standing armies he, with some reason, classes with the prostitutes, whose trade they so largely support:

> "These are the hired bravos who defend
> The tyrant's throne, the bullies of his fear:
> These are the sinks and channels of worst vice,
> The refuse of society, the dregs
> Of all that is most vile: their cold hearts blend
> Deceit with sternness, ignorance with pride,
> All that is mean and villainous with rage,
> Which hopelessness of good and self-contempt
> Alone might kindle; they are decked in wealth,
> Honour, and power, then are sent abroad
> To do their work. The pestilence that stalks
> In gloomy triumph through some eastern land
> Is less destroying."

Commerce fares no better at his hands. It springs from the "twin-sister of religion, selfishness:"

> "Hence commerce springs, the venal interchange
> Of all that human art or nature yield;
> Which wealth should purchase not, but want demand,

And natural kindness hasten to supply
From the full fountain of its boundless love,
For ever stifled, drained, and tainted now."

* * * * * *

"All things are sold: the very light of heaven
Is venal; earth's unsparing gifts of love,
The smallest and most despicable things
That lurk in the abysses of the deep,
All objects in our life, even life itself,
And the poor pittance which the laws allow
Of liberty, the fellowship of man,
Those duties which his heart of human love
Should urge him to perform instinctively,
Are bought and sold as in a public mart
Of undisguising selfishness, that sets
On each its price, the stamp-mark of her reign.
Even love is sold; the solace of all woe
Is turned to deadliest agony, old age
Shivers in selfish beauty's loathing arms,
And youth's corrupted impulses prepare
A life of horror from the blighting bane
Of commerce; whilst the pestilence that springs
From unenjoying sensualism, has filled
All human life with hydra-headed woes."

With this last vigorous tirade we may take our leave of the poem.

Queen Mab is chiefly interesting as being the forerunner of *Prometheus Unbound*, containing as it does the first rough sketch of the philosophy which, purified and perfected, is embodied in the great lyrical drama in a mythical form. There, however, we find some glimpses of an evolution-theory which are not discernible in the juvenile poem.

Mab herself is the poetical imagination, which reveals the highest truths, the Witch of Atlas being an incarnation of the same faculty in a more playful mood.

Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew—who figures in *Queen Mab*, is alluded to in *Alastor*, and reappears in *Hellas*—is Shelley's Prospero, the beneficent magician who, like Prometheus, has learnt wisdom through suffering.

Irish Pamphlets.

The *Address to the Irish People*, *Proposals for an Association, etc.*, and *Declaration of Rights*, which owed their origin to that sudden raid into Ireland which caused Godwin such uneasiness, have a considerable interest as pendants to *Queen Mab*, inasmuch as they show with what innocent fervour the poet burned to become a practical reformer. Catholic Ireland, oppressed and downtrodden by Protestant England, claimed his sympathies, and appeared to be a fit theatre for his first effort to reform the world. As he naïvely explains in the Postscript to his *Address*, "I have now been a week in Dublin, during which time I have endeavoured to make myself more accurately acquainted with the state of the public mind on those great topics of grievances which induced me to select Ireland as a theatre, the widest and fairest, for the operations of the determined friend of religious and political freedom.

"The result of my observations has determined me to propose an association for the purposes of restoring Ireland to the prosperity which she possessed before the Union Act; and the religious freedom which the involuntariness of faith ought to have taught all monopolists

of heaven, long, long ago, that every one had a right to possess."

None of the three brochures thus issued by Shelley can be said to display much practical capacity for getting at the people whom he desired to influence; indeed, of him, less even than most men, could it be said that he "needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." Shelley did *not* know what was in man. But while the *Address* and the *Proposals* are rather tedious effusions of vague philanthropy, which, if Ireland had been peopled with "mute inglorious" Shelleys, might have caused a revolution in the "Golden City" of Dublin, much like that described in *Laon and Cythna*, but which could have had but little effect in bringing about a patriotic alliance between extant Protestants and Catholics, the *Declaration of Rights* is a remarkable document, which concisely and epigrammatically embodies a philosophic code of democratic politics. A few of the more striking aphorisms will suffice to give the spirit of this code :—

"I. Government has no rights; it is a delegation from several individuals for the purpose of securing their own. It is, therefore, just only so far as it exists by their consent, useful only so far as it operates to their well-being.

"V. The majority of every country have a right to perfect their government. The minority should not disturb them; they ought to secede, and form their own system in their own way.

"IX. No man has a right to disturb the public

peace by personally resisting the execution of a law, however bad. He ought to acquiesce, using at the same time the utmost powers of his reason to promote its repeal.

"X. A man must have a right to act in a certain manner before it can be his duty. He may before he ought.

"XII. A man has a right to unrestricted liberty of discussion. Falsehood is a scorpion that will sting itself to death.

"XIII. A man has not only a right to express his thoughts, but it is his duty to do so.

"XVI. The present generation cannot bind their posterity: the few cannot promise for the many.

"XVIII. Expediency is inadmissible in morals. Politics are only sound when conducted on principles of morality; they are, in fact, the morals of nations.

"XXIX. Every man has a right to a certain degree of leisure and liberty, because it is his duty to attain a certain degree of knowledge. He may before he ought."

The most important principles in this declaration are, perhaps, the making a man's duties dependent upon his rights, and the trusting to persuasion and passive resistance as the instruments of reform. Shelley's horror of violence, and faith in the persuasive eloquence of truth, are natural consequences of his belief in the essential goodness of human nature. His Quakerlike detestation of physical force appears in his *Address to the Irish People*, as afterwards in *Laon and Cythna* and *The Masque of*

Anarchy. In it he says, "I agree with the Quakers so far as they disclaim violence, and trust their cause wholly and solely to its truth; if you are not convinced, give it up. In no case employ violence; the way to liberty and happiness is never to trangress the rules of virtue and justice. Liberty and happiness are founded upon virtue and justice; if you destroy the one you destroy the other. However ill they may act, this will be no excuse for you, if you follow their example; it ought rather to warn you from pursuing so bad a method. Depend upon it, Irishmen, your cause shall not be neglected. I will fondly hope that the schemes for your happiness and liberty, as well as those for the happiness and liberty of the world, will not be wholly fruitless. One secure method of defeating them is violence on the side of the injured party." And in another place he says, "Then firmly yet quietly resist. When one cheek is struck, turn the other to the insulting coward. You will be truly brave: you will resist and conquer."

Like the "wandering herdsmen" of that lovely chorus in *Prometheus*, he dwells with hope on the small beginnings of good that he sees in the world, as an earnest of better things: "I look with an eye of hope and pleasure on the present state of things, gloomy and incapable of improvement as they may appear to others. It delights me to see that men begin to think and act for the good of others."

The prose fragment entitled *The Assassins*, written in 1814, the year after *Queen Mab* was printed, shows

an advance in conception and style upon the early romances, though with a tinge of the same juvenile extravagance in incident and sentiment. The *Refutation of Deism*, written the same year, is, perhaps, a more remarkable performance for a young man of two and twenty, being a subtly reasoned argument, nominally in favour of Christianity against theism, but really in favour of atheism against both these forms of faith. In it not only does the extent of the young author's reading appear in his at least superficial familiarity with the literature of the subject; but his own dexterity in dealing with argument is shown in the neat manner in which he states the case on either side, and finally shows that most of the arguments brought against Christianity by the theists may be turned against the theists by the atheists. Shelley's own bias is, however, apparent throughout; and there is an approach to caricature in the manner in which Eusebes and Theosophus are made to explode each other's theories, while each is "hoist with his own petard." Though not evincing much originality, the brochure is evidently the work of a thinker and a subtle one.

"ALASTOR."

Among the poems published in 1816 (ætat. 24) *Alastor* is the most noteworthy. It is Shelley's *Werther*, —the product of a period in which the despair produced by the idealist's contact with the actual world becomes predominant. Most of the poems published

at the same time, *Mutability*, *Dakrusi Dioiso*, *Lechlade Churchyard*, *To Wordsworth*, etc., are, indeed, full of the melancholy of a soul brooding over the mysteries of life and death—physical decay and the failure of souls. *Alastor* is the Spirit of Solitude, the evil demon that isolates a soul from its fellows. If not exactly "Custom" or "Hypocrisy," he may perhaps be regarded as their progeny. Shelley represents the crime or mistake of his hero to have been the pursuit of a solitary ideal: "The Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin." The poem may be contrasted with Keats's *Endymion*, which also represents a soul in search of the ideal, which, unlike the Poet of *Alastor*, it finally discovers in the real.

Alastor was written in the summer of 1815, on Shelley's return from the Continent, shortly after the excursion to the source of the Thames, during which the stanzas written in Lechlade Churchyard were produced. In the previous spring an eminent physician had "pronounced that he was rapidly dying of consumption." Hence, although these serious pulmonary symptoms disappeared with mysterious rapidity, *Alastor*, like many of its companion poems, is over-gloomed by the shadow of death. Its scenery is inspired by the oak glades of Windsor Forest, his days having been spent in the Great Park there.

"*Alastor*," says Mrs. Shelley, "is written in a very different tone from *Queen Mab*. In the latter Shelley poured out all the cherished speculations of his youth—all the irrepressible emotions of sympathy, censure, and

hope to which the present suffering, and what he considers the proper destiny, of his fellow-creatures gave birth. *Alastor*, on the contrary, contains an individual interest only. A very few years, with their attendant events, had checked the ardour of Shelley's hopes; though he still thought them well grounded, and that to advance their fulfilment was the noblest task man could achieve.

"None of Shelley's poems is more characteristic than this. The solemn spirit that reigns throughout, the worship of the majesty of Nature, the broodings of a poet's heart in solitude—the mingling of the exulting joy which the various aspect of the visible universe inspires, with the sad and struggling pangs which human passion imparts—give a touching interest to the whole. The death which he had often contemplated during the last months as certain and near, he here represented in such colours as had, in his lonely musings, soothed his soul to peace."

In *Alastor* Shelley has indeed found his voice, and sings his first song of ravishing music. The "divine despair" of the poet's soul breathes in every line, and seems to fill the ideal landscape with an atmosphere of ethereal melancholy, which the wind of eager desire on which it is borne onward cannot disturb. We fairly enter the lower Shelleyan world, "where music and moonlight and feeling are one." The poet is here "the nightingale, and not the lark." In the *Prometheus* we are made denizens of his higher world; he is there nightingale and lark in one, singing in the breezy sunlight of dewy dawn.

CHAPTER III.

"LAON AND CYTHNA"—"PRINCE ATHANASE."

"LAON AND CYTHNA."

A FAR more important poem than *Alastor* is *Laon and Cythna*, usually known as *The Revolt of Islam*, published in 1818, but written in the summer of 1817, while Shelley was resident at Marlow. "The poem," as Mrs. Shelley tells us, "was written in his boat, as it floated under the beech groves of Bisham, or during wanderings in the neighbouring country, which is distinguished for peculiar beauty."

The preface is interesting, both as a commentary on the poem, and as a specimen of Shelley's early prose style, modelled no doubt to some extent upon Godwin's, and with a grave, eighteenth-century ceremony in its lucid "sweet reasonableness." The author is still a doctrinaire of the Godwin type, eagerly talking about "the universal toleration and benevolence of true philanthropy;" and he describes his work as "a story of human passion in its most universal character"—"a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and

progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind."

Laon and Cythna is the second term in that series of distinctly philosophical poems, beginning with *Queen Mab*, culminating in *Prometheus Unbound*, and left still incomplete in *The Triumph of Life*—poems in which Shelley has embodied his general theory of life. In *Queen Mab* the statement of this is somewhat crude and baldly didactic; in *Laon and Cythna* we have a visionary presentment of the struggle between ideal ethical principles and the debased morality of the actual world; in the *Prometheus* the eternal struggle between good and evil, love and the stagnant and stagnating power of injustice, is the theme of supremest song; while *The Triumph of Life*, if completed, would probably have been something like a Shelleyan philosophy of history.

Like *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound*, *Laon and Cythna* is a song of hope. The cloud of melancholy which brooded over *Alastor* is now lifted. "Methinks," says Shelley in his preface, "those who now live have survived an age of despair." The poem is, as he truly calls it, "A Vision of the Nineteenth Century;" and it delicately touches some of the most characteristic chords in the spiritual progress of this century, chief among which is that of the regenerative mission of women. The poem is the Epic of Woman. Cythna—in Laon's arms, or in the harem of the Tyrant; seated on her throne of liberty, or dashing to the rescue of Laon on her black horse—is its great apocalyptic figure.

It is she, with her divine capacity for suffering and sympathy, her passionate self-control and lightning-like out-flashing of conscience, who is the true liberator. It is she who slays oppression with the sword of her mouth. Miss Blind has rightly called attention to the "new type of woman" created by Shelley in literature. It was not for nothing he had felt the influence of the pure and beautiful spirit of Mary Wollstonecraft—that prototype of the modern woman, who has burst the chains of her long slavery, and found a conscience to feel and a tongue to cry against the oppressions of the earth.

The near relationship of the hero and heroine, as described in the earlier version of the poem, though afterwards altered, reluctantly and under pressure, is illustrative of the remoteness of Shelley's mind from every-day life; and even as an ideal conception it evidences a strange obtuseness of feeling for the delicate complexities of human relationship. It is one of those startling outrages against the moral code of his day and generation, which at first sight seem to be merely ugly elvish vagaries, like the commination pronounced upon his father, but which were really the result of abstract principles carried out to their utmost practical consequences with all the fearless zeal of an idealist. Just as he adopted the name of "atheist" to express his "abhorrence of superstition," he made his hero and heroine brother and sister, "to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life." He desired, in fact, to bring his reader face to face with his grand thesis, that

benevolence is morality, or at least the principle of moral right. He uses this incident to show that the morality of our present civilization is made up of two elements—a natural or eternal element, dependent upon the abstract principle of benevolence, and an artificial or changeable one, dependent upon usage or custom; the whole force of his rhetoric being employed in proclaiming that the social evils of the world have arisen from men's making the artificial element of custom supremely important, to the neglect of the eternal element of benevolence. As Mr. Rossetti has pithily put the drift of the argument which underlies *Laon and Cythna*, "It must, I suppose, be conceded that if there were (as indeed there are or have been) communities in which brothers commonly marry their sisters, the individuals commit herein no wrong; while, if there were a community in which people commonly gouged out the eyes of others who resisted, the individuals *would* be wrong. Shelley exhibits an analogous example."

It is, no doubt, true that there *is* a strong tendency on the part of mankind to think more of conventional than eternal morality, and so far Shelley's cry of warning is very right and necessary; but there is a partial fallacy in his implication that conventional is altogether opposed to eternal morality. Even granting that benevolence is the sole moral principle, which may well be questioned, the casuistry of practical benevolence will change with the changing conditions of human life. Although essentially a poet of progress,

he was undoubtedly still under the spell of Rousseau's morbid and anti-progressive idea, that primitive instincts are alone the "natural" instincts of man. Like Perdita, he shrank from the idea of culture, which, indeed, may be made the occasion of the shallowest cant; and would scarcely have paid more attention than she to Polixenes, when he said that—

> "Nature is made better by no mean,
> But nature makes that mean: so over that art,
> Which, you say, adds to nature, is an art
> That nature makes. . . .
> This is an art
> Which does mend nature,—change it rather: but
> The art itself is nature."

A familiarity with the modern conception of evolution, and a slight knowledge of the natural history of mankind, might have given a backbone of reality to his philosophy, and corrected what was weakest and most immature in his theory of life. The objectionable incident in *Laon and Cythna* is, in a poem professing to be "A Vision of the Nineteenth Century," a moral solecism and an artistic blemish. "La sauvagerie," says Sainte Beuve, "est toujours là à deux pas, et, dès qu'on lâche pied elle recommence." Such a solecism as this gives an uncomfortable impression of something barbaric in Shelley's emotional nature, as though he had escaped the influence of that stream of social evolution, which has induced certain phases of feeling which in civilized communities have become permanent instincts. It produces—and rightly produces, if the idea of the family,

gradually attained by the slow process of evolution, be regarded as something more than an effete convention—a strong feeling of disgust, which mars the effect of a beautiful poem; and Mr. Rossetti has done wisely in retaining the amended text, as regards this incident, in his popular edition.

In choosing the Spenserian stanza for his great visionary poem, Shelley challenges comparison with Spenser himself, and with Byron; and it cannot be said that he appears to advantage in this comparison. The great lyrical poet is a little out of his element in this complicated stanza, which, with its somewhat ponderous march, lends itself ill to his swift volubility of utterance. Compare the impetuous rapidity and pale intensity of Shelley's verse with the lulling harmony, the lingering cadences, the voluptuous colour of Spenser's, or with the grandiose majesty of Byron's. The stanzas of the *Faëry Queene* have something of the wholesome old-world mellowness of Haydn's music; those of *Laon and Cythna* something of the morbid modern fever of Chopin's; while Byron's abrupt rhetorical pauses and distinct cæsura in his Alexandrines are at the opposite extreme from Shelley's swiftly gliding melodies of verse. In *Adonais*, indeed, a poem on which he bestowed much labour, he handles the stanza in a masterly manner, and endows it with an individual music beautiful and new; and even *Laon and Cythna* is full of exquisite passages, in which the very rhymes lend wings to his imagination, and become the occasion of sweet out-of-the-way modes of expression, full of ethereal poetry of the most Shelleyan kind.

The beautiful dedication, *To Mary*, has a special value not merely from its autobiographical allusions, but because one of the stanzas contains a direct tribute to his wife's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, whose name so well deserves a place in connection with the poem. It will be remembered that she died when Mary Shelley was born.

> "They say that thou wert lovely from thy birth,
> Of glorious parents, thou aspiring child.
> I wonder not—for one then left this earth
> Whose life was like a setting planet mild,
> Which clothed thee in the radiance undefiled
> Of its departing glory ; still her fame
> Shines on thee, thro' the tempests dark and wild
> Which shake these latter days ; and thou canst claim
> The shelter, from thy sire, of an immortal name."

Canto I.

In the first (introductory) canto, we find Shelley's mythological genius full-fledged, and his affinity with Blake becomes manifest. The poem opens with a vision of the dawn of liberty, the first hope of which appears like a glimpse of blue sky, when the clouds are rifted by the tempest of revolution. The moon, for Shelley as for Keats a type of the "*ewig-Weibliche*"—the eternal feminine principle—is seen as a "pallid semicircle," a crescent hope, in the midst of it; and then we have the apparition of "an eagle and a serpent wreathed in fight." The whole description of the gathering darkness, the

dreadful repose before the tempest, the cleaving of the gloom by the tempest when it breaks, the blue glimpse of the sky above and emerald gleam on the sea below, the swift coming into clearer and clearer vision of the eagle and the serpent, and their fierce fight, with doubtful alternations of success, until the snake falls into the sea, is most vivid, and full of delicate atmospheric colour hard to match elsewhere, except in Shelley's own poetry.

In this poem, in which he presents the purest Christian morality, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you," etc., Shelley ceases to regard evil as that merely negative thing it appears to be in *Queen Mab*, and in dealing, however ideally, with the practical battle between good and evil, he becomes possessed with that quasi-Manichæan dualism with which Christianity itself is so deeply imbued; but he is more nakedly Manichæan in his language. The "two powers" which "o'er mortal things dominion hold" are "twin genii, equal gods." The Eagle, an incarnation of the "blood-red comet," or evil principle, is analogous to Blake's Urizen, the god of jealousy, and reappears as "Jupiter, the Tyrant of the world," in *Prometheus Unbound*. He is Christ's "Prince of this world." The Serpent, an incarnation of the "morning star," or good principle, is, like Blake's Orc, an avatar of the human genius, and reappears as Prometheus himself. The Woman, who plays the part of Asia to the Promethean Serpent, is an incarnation of the Spirit of Nature, or divine Love; but here she assumes the form of ideal womanhood—the new Eve, kindled

into love of the morning star, Prometheus-Lucifer, by a poet's books :—

> "A dying poet gave me books, and blest
> With wild but holy talk the sweet unrest
> In which I watched him as he died away—
> A youth with hoary hair—a fleeting guest
> Of our lone mountains—and this love did sway
> My spirit like a storm, contending there alway."

Mr. Forman has pointed out the similarity between this incident and that of the Poet in *Alastor* being tended by an Arab maiden.

This personification, like most of Shelley's, is perfectly vital. She is a breathing woman, even though she mysteriously vanishes into "supernatural darkness" at last. As she says of herself—

> "Mine is a human form,
> Like that thou wearest—touch me—shrink not now !
> My hand thou feel'st is not a ghost's, but warm
> With human blood."

There is an almost Dantesque intensity in some of the delicate touches which complete her picture. Take this, for instance :

> "Thus the dark tale which history doth unfold
> I knew, but not, methinks, as others know,
> *For they weep not.*"

Or this :

> "'Thou fear'st not then the serpent on thy heart?'
> 'Fear it!' she said, with brief and passionate cry,
> And spake no more."

We may compare the attributes of this woman who carries the poet swiftly over the sea in her boat, which

> "like the moon's shade did sway
> Amid reflected stars that in the waters lay,"

and which—

> "had no sail
> But its own curved prow of thin moonstone,"

with those of the feminine Moon in the last act of *Prometheus Unbound*. There is one noteworthy point in her mythological account of the long struggle between the good and evil principles. It is that she describes a primæval fall of the good, not the evil principle. Prometheus-Lucifer is cast out, dethroned, trampled underfoot by the conquering Spirit of Evil :

> "Thus evil triumph'd, and the Spirit of Evil,
> One Power of many shapes which none may know,
> One shape of many names; the Fiend did revel
> In victory, reigning o'er a world of woe,
> For the new race of man went to and fro,
> Famish'd and homeless, loathed and loathing, wild
> And hating good—for his immortal foe
> He changed from starry shape, beauteous and mild,
> To a dire Snake, with man and beast unreconciled."

Shelley may have had various reasons for thus choosing the snake as the type of the good principle. He had loved snakes from his childhood, and "the old snake of Field Place," which was killed by the gardener's scythe, no doubt continued to haunt his imagination. A boyish opposition to popular theology may also have induced this choice; but the fact that the snake is so

universally abhorred and feared is, no doubt, what gave its chief point to his myth.

The poet here apparently abandons that idea of a primæval golden age, which we find clinging to his imagination in *Queen Mab*, and to which he recurs in the *Prometheus*. The primæval empire of the Spirit of Evil is only gradually shaken by the periodically renewed insurrection of the Spirit of Good :

> "In the world's youth his empire was as firm
> As its foundations—soon the Spirit of Good,
> Though in the likeness of a loathsome worm,
> Sprang from the billows of the formless flood,
> Which shrank and fled; and with that Fiend of blood
> Renew'd the doubtful war."

It may here be remarked that while the poem is deeply imbued with the ethical spirit of Christianity, as regards the relations between man and man, Shelley's mythology differs from that of Christianity in many important points, and with it his conception of man's relation to God, or the gods. For him, as for Blake the good power is not the Almighty Creator of hell, who makes even the rebellious devils the ministers of his wrath against sinful mankind, fallen from the beginning into predestined damnation; but the power which suffers and rebels, and which is itself intimately connected with, or in fact incarnate in, the human spirit. For Shelley man, instead of being essentially vile, is essentially good and pure. Sin is the abortion produced by the tyranny of the evil power that now reigns over the earth—"the something not ourselves that

makes for *un*-righteousness;" not the natural outcome of essential pollution. How far either of these conceptions agrees with the facts of life affords matter for infinite discussion. Shelley's creed, though dreary enough for those whose need of "a personal Saviour" outweighs their need of a justification of the ways of God to man, at least avoids the dark pessimism which, however euphuistically concealed, underlies the dogmatic system of ecclesiastical Christianity. We may again compare the views put forward by John Stuart Mill, in his essay on Nature, with Shelley's. These utterances mark a revulsion from the ascetic temper which regards man as a trembling criminal at the bar of divine justice, for whom anything short of hell is an "unmerited mercy." Men not only begin secretly to look upon themselves as fairy princes kept out of their birthright of happiness, unfortunate creatures more sinned against than sinning, but they begin to acknowledge to themselves that they do so, and to proclaim it on the house-tops as a philosophic creed. Now-a-days it seems to us like a paradox when, in direct contradiction of Shelley's aphorism, "A man must have a right to act in a certain manner before it can be his duty," Mr. Matthew Arnold tells us that "a man has no rights, but only duties."

The temple to which the poet voyages with the Woman and the Serpent is, of course, that "Temple of the Spirit" to which Laon and Cythna are wafted after death by their child, in a *moonlike* boat, similar to that "prow of thin moonstone" which obeys the Woman.

They enter the temple through "a portal wide" which has "a roof of moonstone carved;" and, on entering the central hall, the Woman fades away into supernatural darkness, which overhangs the throne of the Serpent, now become a youth. This is the dark mother-force of Nature in its most elemental form, and it is rather startling to find a flesh-and-blood woman so suddenly resolved into this cloudy nothing.

Canto II.

With the second canto begins the narrative portion of this beautiful, though unsatisfactory, poem. Unfortunately, if Shelley possesses the power of making his visions living realities, and of giving flesh-and-blood forms to his abstractions, he often makes his men and women little more than abstractions, and reduces the real world to a vague and fantastic dream. Hence we find few scenes in the real story as vivid as the preliminary vision. Stanza after stanza glides through the reader's brain, perplexing him with its voluble music, but leaving little for his imagination to grasp as a distinct picture. The grammar is often vague, and even when after much consideration the meaning becomes tolerably plain, the impression made on the mind is curiously dreamlike and evanescent. There are, indeed, here and there, passages full of descriptive power. The scenes of pestilence and famine are like creations of the

pencil of Blake; and there are beautiful glimpses of landscape, steeped in Shelley's elysian atmosphere, but with delicate touches of colour revealing a close observation of certain things in nature.

Spite of the outrageous improbability of the incidents—partly due to their typical nature, but partly also to Shelley's difficulty of walking on the plain surface of the earth—the poem is full of human interest. Could he but have made his ideal Argolis a little less moonshiny, could he have given it something of the reality of Prospero's enchanted island, this interest would have been immensely increased. Laon and Cythna, brought up together from earliest youth, know each other thoroughly. He kindles in her the love of liberty, and she the love of purity in him, saving him from that debauchment of the young imagination by the cynicism of old age, which is unfortunately no mere fancy:

> "Old age with its grey hair,
> And wrinkled legends of unworthy things,
> And icy sneers."

Cythna is, of course, the principal personage in this woman's epic. She is a true prophecy of those noble women of the nineteenth century who are so courageously fighting the battle of their sex and of humanity in the face of much obloquy and misrepresentation. She hates, instinctively and before experience, that "unenjoying sensualism" of which women are the victims.

"She mourned that grace and power were thrown as food
To the hyæna lust, who, among graves,
Over his loathed meal, laughing in agony, raves."

It is she who indignantly asks—

"Can man be free if woman be a slave?"

and who vows to redeem her sex:

"Yes, I will tread Pride's golden palaces,
Through Penury's roofless huts and squalid cells
Will I descend, where'er in abjectness
Woman, with some vile slave her tyrant, dwells."

It is she who

"doth equal laws and justice teach
To woman, outraged and polluted long."

Her meek martyrdom is more powerful against tyranny than Laon's armed resistance; and she converts her executioner by the might of persuasive words:

"And with these quiet words—'For thine own sake
I prithee spare me'—did with ruth so take
All hearts, that even the torturer who had bound
Her meek, calm frame, ere it was yet impaled,
Loosen'd her, weeping then."

The plot of this scarcely mature epic, which extends through twelve cantos, is somewhat bald. The incidents are but loosely strung together, and are sometimes almost as preposterous as those of the novels; so that all the power of Shelley's ideal fervour and poetical genius cannot prevent a certain sense of the ludicrous occasionally mingling with the reader's admiration. I may, perhaps, be excused if I attempt to give, in plain

prose, a summary of the action of the poem, which is rather bewildering in the iridescent verse of the original. The young Laon of the second canto is a faint ideal reflex of Shelley himself; but he lacks not only flesh-and-blood reality, but Shelley's own vigorous character. It is as impossible to conceive of such an unreal personage effecting what he is described as effecting, even in the vague dream-world in which he is placed, as it is to imagine one of Mr. Burne Jones's beautiful but effeminate heroes acting a great heroic part. His childhood is fed upon the ordinary Shelleyan idealisms. He is disillusionized by the falsehood of a friend, and only saved from suicide by his "great aim." He turns from the present world to the "deathless minds" of old—

> "Till from that glorious intercourse, at last,
> As from a mine of magic store, I drew
> Words which were weapons."

Then follows an account of his early relations with Cythna. She is as his own shadow, and when, as he says,

> "My song
> Peopled with thoughts the boundless universe,
> A mighty congregation, which were strong,
> Where'er they trod the darkness, to disperse
> The cloud of that unutterable curse
> Which clings upon mankind,"

she becomes the echo of this "holy and heroic verse," and gives his songs impassioned voice. She thus remains pure and unpolluted by the tyranny which degrades the rest of her sex. All this is finely felt by

Shelley, and still more so her reciprocal influence upon Laon:

> "In me communion with this purest being
> Kindled intenser zeal, and made me wise
> In knowledge, which in hers mine own mind seeing,
> Left in the human world few mysteries."

The horrors of that sensuality of which women have been the patient victims were but feebly felt by him until she gave him a heart alive to these things. He declares that "this slavery must be broken," and she accepts with enthusiasm the task of freeing her own sex. In resolving to part from Laon, she thus expresses the positivist idea of "subjective immortality," which she fears is all that can be hoped for beyond the grave.:

> "We meet again
> Within the minds of men, whose lips shall bless
> Our memory, and whose hopes its light retain,
> When these dissevered bones are trodden in the plain."

Cantos III. and IV.

The third canto describes the sudden abduction of Cythna by the minions of the tyrant Othman, under whose sway Argolis lies helpless. Laon starts from a troubled dream, waked by her cry as the armed men seize her. He catches up a small knife, and rushes to her rescue.

> "I started to behold her, for delight
> And exultation, and a joyance free,
> Solemn, serene, and lofty, fill'd the light
> Of the calm smile with which she look'd on me:

So that I fear'd some brainless ecstasy,
Wrought from that bitter woe, had wilder'd her.
'Farewell! farewell!' she said, as I drew nigh.
At first my peace was marr'd by this strange stir:
Now I am calm as truth—its chosen minister.

"'Look not so, Laon—say farewell in hope:
These bloody men are but the slaves who bear
Their mistress to her task.'"

Thus meekly and exultingly she goes to her martyrdom; but Laon, forgetting his Quaker principles for a moment, stabs three of her captors, is himself cut down, carried away in a swoon, and chained to a lofty column overlooking the plain.

The account given by the Hermit, in the fourth canto, of the working of Laon's spirit upon his own, so that the old man's writings have kindled the sacred flame of liberty all through the land, is touching, Shelley's hopes with regard to his own writings being here innocently reproduced. Parents read them to their children, girls forget to pine for love, having a nobler interest, and evil custom loses its hold on men's minds.

"The tyrants of the Golden City tremble
At voices which are heard about their streets,
The ministers of fraud can scarce dissemble
The lies of their own heart; but when one meets
Another at the shrine, he inly weets,
Though he says nothing, that the truth is known;
Murderers are pale upon the judgment seats,
And gold grows vile even to the wealthy crone,
And laughter fills the Fane, and curses shake the Throne."

A "maiden fair," in whom we of course recognize Cythna, long the thrall of the Tyrant, has publicly

preached the liberation of women in the streets, and remains unmolested, armed in her own eloquence.

The fine passage which describes Cythna's mission to women at least contains no vain dream, but a true prophesy of what is actually taking place in this, the century of women.

The Hermit concludes by describing the present condition of affairs. He regrets the necessity for bloodshed which exists, owing to the raising of the standard of liberty, while the custom-hardened guards of the Tyrant are determined to resist to the death.

> "Blood soon, altho' unwillingly, to shed
> The free cannot forbear."

Lamenting the cowardice of bloodshedding, he therefore calls upon Laon to give love an articulate voice, and so prevent the inarticulate folly of slaughtering those whom the votaries of liberty are too weak to persuade:

> "If blood be shed, 'tis but a change and choice
> Of bonds,—from slavery to cowardice
> A wretched fall!—uplift thy charmèd voice,
> Pour on those evil men the love that lies
> Hovering within those spirit-soothing eyes."

Laon then feels his youth fall on him, "like a wind descending on still waters," and departs for the Golden City, lonely for Cythna's loss, yet with a hope that he may find her in the maiden who has "reared the torch of Truth afar."

Canto V.

In the fifth canto Laon arrives at the camp of the insurgents outside the Golden City. He contemplates with exultation the myriads lying asleep, with the great battle between good and evil in their hearts now decided by the victory of good. In the camp he meets an armed youth, apparently the only watchman, and so bad a one that Laon hails him before he challenges Laon. Instead of reporting himself at head-quarters, if anything so commonplace may be supposed to have existed in this camp of idealists, Laon remains idly talking over their "immortal hopes," until morning, when he discovers that this youth is his long-lost friend, who was not really false, but merely slandered. While they are weeping "tears of repenting joy," the ill-watched camp is surprised, and the party of liberty, who are, no doubt, too democratic to have any officers, are massacred like sheep. At last some one shouts the name of Laon, the "patriot hosts" echo it "thro' the vaulted sky," and the slaves of the Tyrant fly in a sudden panic, pursued and hemmed in by their gentle adversaries :

> "And then revenge and fear
> Made the high virtue of the patriots fail :
> One pointed on his foe the mortal spear—
> I rush'd before its point and cried, 'Forbear, forbear!'
>
> "The spear transfix'd my arm that was uplifted
> In swift expostulation, and the blood
> Gushed round its point."

Thus Laon sheds his own blood in defence of his enemies,

and, taking it as his text, expostulates with them in a noble speech which carries the Christian precept, "Love your enemies," to its utmost limits.

"I smiled, and—'O thou gifted
With eloquence which shall not be withstood,
Flow thus!' I cried, in joy, 'thou vital flood,
Until my heart be dry, ere thus the cause
For which thou wert aught worthy be subdued—
Ah! ye are pale,—ye weep,—your passions pause,—
'Tis well! ye feel the truth of love's benignant laws.

"'Soldiers, our brethren and our friends are slain.
Ye murder'd them, I think, as they did sleep!
Alas! what have ye done? The slightest pain
Which ye might suffer there were eyes to weep;
But ye have quenched them—there were smiles to steep
Your hearts in balm, but they are lost in woe;
And those whom love did set his watch to keep
Around your tents, truth's freedom to bestow,
Ye stabb'd as they did sleep—but they forgive ye now.

"'Oh, wherefore should ill ever flow from ill,
And pain still keener pain for ever breed?
We all are brethren—even the slaves who kill
For hire are men; and to avenge misdeed
On the misdoer doth but Misery feed
With her own broken heart! O Earth, O Heaven!
And thou, dread Nature, which to every deed
And all that lives, or is, to be hath given,
Even as to thee have these done ill, and are forgiven!

"'Join, then, your hands and hearts, and let the past
Be as a grave which gives not up its dead
To evil thoughts—' a film then overcast
My sense with dimness."

Laon thus faints, but his words and deeds of self-sacrifice have wrought the conversion of even the Tyrant's slaves, and he leads friends and foes in one commingled

band, "a nation made free by love," into the Golden City. However preposterous the suddenness of this change may appear, it must be confessed that we have here a noble ideal conception, never before poetically treated, and one which, if handled by Shelley with maturer powers, might have produced a deep impression on the world's imagination. There is a peculiarly subtle Shelleyan touch where, in the beautiful stanzas in which he describes the change of heart of "these bloody bands so lately reconciled," he says—

> "And every one on them more gently smiled,
> Because they had done evil."

This has a taste of that "joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" spoken of in the Gospel, and recalls Blake's aphorism—that heaven is not a place where there is no sin, but where there is perpetual forgiveness of sins.

The whole description of the fallen Tyrant—his discovery in his desolate palace, with a single child for companion; his utter prostration as Laon leads him forth in "pity, not scorn;" his cry to Laon, demanding food for the child: "She hungers, slave, stab her or give her bread;" the demand of the people for his blood, and Laon's stern rebuke of the fear which prompts this revengeful spirit—is among the finest things in these cantos. The account of the festival of Liberty, with its allegorical statues of Wisdom, Equality, and Nature, is, on the other hand, among the weakest. The lyrical hymn of Cythna—or Laone, as she calls herself—with

its commonplace reiteration of the praises of Wisdom, Equality, Free-Love, Vegetarianism, etc., is probably the worst lyric Shelley has incorporated with any of his important works.

Canto VI.

The sixth canto narrates the new surprise and total slaughter of the patriots on the very night of the festival, with the exception of Laon, snatched from the field of battle at the last moment by Cythna, who, on a Tartar steed, strikes panic into the conquering host of the Tyrant's slaves. Anything more vague than the account of this sudden relapse of the converted Othmanites it would be difficult to find, except in Shelley's own writings; yet there are vigorous bits of description, in particular details, here and there, and no lack of felicitous phrases, as when he calls Panic "the pale fiend who charms strength to forswear her right," or speaks of a pike as

> "The instrument
> Of those who war but on their native ground
> For natural rights."

Shelley's views on war, so far as can be gathered from this episode, seem to have now assumed the form of a compromise between absolute passive resistance and the employment of a limited amount of physical force; but he leaves it a doubtful matter how far he considers even the final resort to arms in self-defence a mistake. Laon's bundle of pikes proves much less effectual than his persuasive eloquence, which he appears to have abandoned in despair.

The subsequent description of the nuptials of Laon and Cythna in the marble ruin on a rocky hill overhanging the ocean is very beautiful and pure, or would be so if he did not so uncompromisingly insist upon their close relationship. Their long trance of love, which lasts for more than two days, thus occupying more time than the conquest and reconquest of the Golden City itself, is of a piece with the rest of this visionary poem, which, to be fully enjoyed, must be judged by its own lawless laws, if such a judgment be possible.

Cythna and he having fasted for two days, Laon mounts the human-minded Tartar steed to seek food for her, and comes to a desolated village in a wood. And here ensues the most graphic piece of description in the whole poem—that of Laon's meeting the frenzied woman who calls herself Pestilence. I have before noticed its resemblance to Blake's terrible designs; but here there are no faults of drawing to be condoned—all is perfectly in keeping, and the frightful truth of the passage places Shelley's genius in a new light. We have here, perhaps, the most imaginative picture of the stern realities of war ever drawn.

The village has been the scene of a massacre, and Laon finds nothing but corpses in the ruined houses, and around the fountain in the market-place, the waters of which are brackish with blood. He then seeks for any possible survivor, and the poem proceeds:

> "No living thing was there beside one woman,
> Whom I found wandering in the streets, and she
> Was wither'd from the likeness of aught human
> Into a fiend, by some strange misery;

Soon as she heard my steps she leap'd on me,
And glued her burning lips to mine, and laugh'd
With a loud, long, and frantic laugh of glee,
And cried, 'Now, mortal, thou hast deeply quaff'd
The Plague's blue kisses—soon millions shall pledge the draught!

"'My name is Pestilence: this bosom dry
Once fed two babes—a sister and a brother—
When I came home, one in the blood did lie
Of three death-wounds—the flames had ate the other!
Since then I have no longer been a mother,
But I am Pestilence;—hither and thither
I flit about that I may slay and smother:—
All lips which I have kiss'd must surely wither,
But Death's—if thou art he, we'll go to work together!

"'What seek'st thou here? the moonlight comes in flashes,—
The dew is rising dankly from the dell—
'Twill moisten her! and thou shalt see the gashes
In my sweet boy, now full of worms—but tell
First what thou seek'st.'—'I seek for food.'—'Tis well,
Thou shalt have food; Famine, my paramour,
Waits for us at the feast—cruel and fell
Is Famine, but he drives not from his door
Those whom these lips have kiss'd, alone. No more, no more!'

"As thus she spake, she grasp'd me with the strength
Of madness, and by many a ruin'd hearth
She led, and over many a corpse:—at length
We came to a lone hut where, on the earth
Which made its floor, she in her ghastly mirth,
Gathering from all those homes now desolate,
Had piled three heaps of loaves, making a dearth
Among the dead—round which she set in state
A ring of cold, stiff babes; silent and stark they sate.

"She leap'd upon the pile, and lifted high
Her mad looks to the lightning, and cried: 'Eat!
Share the great feast—to-morrow we must die!'
And then she spurn'd the loaves with her pale feet

Towards her bloodless guests ;—that sight to meet
Mine eyes and my heart ached, and but that she
Who loved me did with absent looks defeat
Despair, I might have raved in sympathy."

Cantos VII. and VIII.

In the seventh canto Laon and Cythna tell each other of all that has happened since their parting seven years ago. Laon's adventures, having been already told in the poem, are dismissed briefly in a few lines ; the mention of Cythna's sympathetic tears, on hearing their recital, gives rise to the following lovely simile :—

"Tears pursued
Each other down her fair and listening cheek,
Fast as the thoughts that fed them, like a flood
From sunbright dells."

Then follows Cythna's story, which, being typical of the sufferings of her whole sex, is described as

"A strange tale of strange endurance,
Like broken memories of many a heart
Woven into one."

Her first experience is of "the hyæna lust," the horrors of which she foreknew in imagination even in her happy girlhood. In describing her captivity in the Tyrant's harem, Shelley clearly utters the great truth that lust is not passion, but absence of passion. For a moment the Tyrant, on hearing her song, "bent to great Nature's sacred power," almost extinguished in him, "and was no longer passionless."

"But when he bade her to his secret bower
Be borne a loveless victim, and she tore
Her locks in agony, and her words of flame
And mightier looks avail'd not; then he bore
Again his load of slavery, and became
A king, a heartless beast, a pageant, and a name."

Lust is deadness of heart—the death of true passion; tyranny, deadness of "sweet reasonableness"—the death of true power. The horrible outrage that lust is to the whole nature, psychical and physical, of a pure woman is well exemplified in the perfectly natural incident of Cythna's madness:

"She told me what a loathsome agony
Is that when selfishness mocks love's delight,
Foul as in dreams' most fearful imagery
To dally with the mowing dead—that night
All torture, fear, or horror made seem light
Which the soul dreams or knows, and when the day
Shone on her awful frenzy from the sight,
When like a spirit in fleshly chains she lay,
Struggling, aghast and pale the Tyrant fled away."

Then follows an episode in which Shelley's imagination sinks into that vague and vapid phantasy which is its besetting sin. An Ethiopean diver plunges with her, at the Tyrant's bidding, through many a cavern of the sea, to an impossible cave, where she is imprisoned for an indefinite period, a sea-eagle which brings her food being her only visitant.

The dissipation of her madness by the birth of her child is another touch of nature in the midst of this phantasmagoria, as is the long trance of despair after her child has been stolen by the diver—a despair which

is not madness, and from which she is roused by sympathy—first, for a nautilus threatened by the sea-eagle, and, secondly, for the suffering world. She thinks of Laon, as Asia thinks of Prometheus in her "lonely vale," and remembers the great hopes he once kindled in her.

The mysterious piece of scene-shifting which liberates Cythna is really almost as absurd as anything in the novels; and the incident of the slave-ship, in which the intensely Shelleyan mariners, whom faith and custom have made the Tyrant's ministers, are converted by a simple speech from Cythna, and undergo a Shelleyan revival, rapid and complete, is not much less unbelievable. Preposterous as is the picture of the crew dancing in the woods with their liberated captive maidens in a transport of humanitarian enthusiasm, there is a fine Shelleyan rhetoric in Cythna's speech, spite of the rather wearisome reiteration of the commonplaces of his philosophy—that the God of the priests is a figment of the imagination, and must be replaced by the idea of love; that men should endeavour

"To live as if to live and love were one,"

and should be ready

"To weep for crime though stain'd with thy friend's dearest blood;"

that men are the slaves of gold, women of men, children of their parents, etc.

She insists upon man's power to conquer circumstances by strength of will:

"This need not be; ye might arise, and will
That gold should lose its power, and thrones their glory;
That love, which none may bind, be free to fill
The world like light; and evil faith, grown hoary
With crime, be quenched and die."

Here is a cardinal instance of Shelley's almost Fichtean faith in the omnipotence of the human will, which I shall have occasion to notice more particularly in speaking of *Julian and Maddalo*. The above passage is almost equivalent to Fichte's doctrine, that if a man wills to live he does live.

"High temples fade like vapour—man alone
Remains, whose will has power when all beside is gone."

Remorse for past crimes she regards as itself almost a crime—certainly a waste of time:

"Reproach not thine own soul, but know thyself,
Nor hate another's crime, nor loathe thine own.
It is the dark idolatry of self
Which, when our thoughts and actions once are gone
Demands that man should weep, and bleed, and groan;
O vacant expiation! be at rest.—
The past is Death's, the future is thine own;
And love and joy can make the foulest breast
A paradise of flowers, where peace might build her nest."

A pleasant doctrine of a natural deliverance from sins, which is, let us hope, not altogether false.

CANTOS IX. AND X.

The ninth canto narrates the progress of that revolution in the Golden City brought about by the preach-

ing of Cythna; and finally she comforts Laon with new hope. Although this revolution has apparently failed, although the votaries of liberty are massacred, the seeds of liberty can never die. The conclusion of her speech to Laon is very beautiful, and shows that Shelley's conception of the new ideal woman of the nineteenth century was a vital one. The lofty thought which breathes musically in every line of it is permeated with womanly tenderness, as the air of morning is filled and flushed with the light of dawn. She falters a moment at the idea that death must come, and that immortality may be a vain dream; but even though

> "Sense and Reason, those enchanters fair,
> Whose word of power is hope, would bid the heart
> That gazed beyond the wormy grave despair,"

she rejects their evidence here.

> "These are blind fancies—reason cannot know
> What sense can neither feel, nor thought conceive;"

i.e. the senselessness of death. Love gives her, even here, an earnest of immortality.

The tenth canto, in which there is a mighty gathering of the priests and potentates of the earth to a final persecution and slaughter of those who still remain faithful to liberty, is a fine one. The Tyrant now sits secure upon his throne, surrounded by "hired assassins." He feels himself "a king in truth," now that he has waded back to power through blood, and he at length has leisure to delight his soul with torture and cruelty. A final massacre of seven days' duration fills the land with the desolate peace of death. Then comes a period

of intense heat, followed by famine and plague upon the cattle, the course of which is splendidly described :

"Peace in the desert fields and villages,
Between the glutted beasts and mangled dead !
Peace in the silent streets ! save when the cries
Of victims to the fiery judgment led,
Made pale their voiceless lips who seem'd to dread
Even in their nearest kindred, lest some tongue
Be faithless to the fear yet unbetrayed ;
Peace in the Tyrant's palace, where the throng
Waste the triumphal hours in festival and song !

"Day after day the burning sun roll'd on
Over the death-polluted land—it came
Out of the east like fire, and fiercely shone
A lamp of Autumn, ripening with its flame
The few lone ears of corn ;—the sky became
Stagnate with heat, so that each cloud and blast
Languish'd and died,—the thirsting air did claim
All moisture, and a rotting vapour past
From the unburied dead, invisible and fast.

"First Want, then Plague, came on the beasts ; their food
Fail'd, and they drew the breath of its decay.
Millions on millions, whom the scent of blood
Had lured, or who, from regions far away,
Had track'd the hosts in festival array,
From their dark deserts ; gaunt and wasting now,
Stalk'd like fell shades among their perish'd prey
In their green eyes a strange disease did glow,
They sank in hideous spasm, or pains severe and slow.

"The fish were poison'd in the stream ; the birds
In the green woods perish'd ; the insect race
Was wither'd up ; the scatter'd flocks and herds
Who had survived the wild beasts' hungry chase,
Died moaning, each upon the other's face
In helpless agony gazing ; round the City
All night, the lean hyænas their sad case
Like starving infants wail'd ; a woeful ditty !
And many a mother wept, pierced with unnatural pity."

Then famine and plague fall upon men in their turn—human flesh is sold in the market-place. Then ensue thirst and madness; and then fear-begotten superstition becomes rampant, and the priests demand new tortures for the heretics who still remain, a Christian priest being the most blatant among all the theolatrous persecutors—followers of

> "Oromaze, and Christ, and Mahomet,
> Moses, and Buddh, Zerdusht, and Brahm, and Foh;
> A tumult of strange names which never met
> Before, as watchwords of a single woe."

Thus woe follows upon woe, with the supernatural horror of the seven last plagues of the Book of Revelation. Laon's commentary on this apparent failure of good in the world expresses the trembling of hope that gazes into the depths of human sin:

> "Who shall dare to say
> The deeds which might and fear brought forth, or weigh
> In balance just the good and evil there?
> He might man's deep and searchless heart display,
> And cast a light on those dim labyrinths, where
> Hope, near imagined chasms, is struggling with despair."

Cantos XI. and XII.

The last two cantos tell of Laon's endeavour to save Cythna by giving himself up to the torturers; and of Cythna's arrival on her black steed, to die with him, at the last moment. The description of the parting of Laon and Cythna, as he goes to give himself up, is beautiful. She stands by the glowing sea, transfigured

in the ecstasy of her own passionate thoughts. Laon stands beside her, but she does not see him, until he has torn himself away without a word or an embrace:

" I stood beside her, but she saw me not—
She look'd upon the sea, and skies, and earth;
Rapture, and love, and admiration wrought
A passion deeper far than tears, or mirth,
Or speech, or gesture, or whate'er has birth
From common joy; which with the speechless feeling
That led her there united, and shot forth
From her far eyes, a light of deep revealing,
All but her dearest self from my regard concealing.

" Her lips were parted, and the measured breath
Was now heard there;—her dark and intricate eyes,
Orb within orb, deeper than sleep or death,
Absorb'd the glories of the burning skies,
Which, mingling with her heart's deep ecstasies,
Burst from her looks and gestures;—and a light
Of liquid tenderness, like love, did rise
From her whole frame, an atmosphere which quite
Array'd her in its beams, tremulous, and soft, and bright.

" She would have clasp'd me to her glowing frame;
Those warm and odorous lips might soon have shed
On mine the fragrance and the invisible flame
Which now the cold winds stole;—she would have laid
Upon my languid heart her dearest head;
I might have heard her voice, tender and sweet;
Her eyes, mingling with mine, might soon have fed
My soul with their own joy. One moment yet
I gazed—we parted then, never again to meet!

" Never but once to meet on earth again!
She heard me as I fled—her eager tone
Sunk on my heart, and almost wove a chain
Around my will to link it with her own,
So that my stern resolve was almost gone.

'I cannot reach thee! whither dost thou fly?
My steps are faint. Come back, thou dearest one—
Return—ah, me! return'—the wind past by
On which those accents died, faint, far, and lingeringly."

Laon, coming disguised as a hermit, finds the Tyrant sitting in full senate, eagerly waiting for news that the arch-heretics are taken. He addresses a last appeal to the Theolaters, whom he calls upon to dare to exercise their wills and throw off the chains of custom and superstition; this done, they may be "glorious, and great, and calm" indeed. His words awaken the enthusiasm of a few young men, who are instantly stabbed in the back by "the men of faith and law." Shelley, like Montaigne, believed that youth was the season of natural virtue, and old age that of cynical coldness.

Finding that his words avail nothing, he exacts an oath that, on his delivering up Laon, Cythna shall be allowed to depart to America, on which land he has pronounced a splendid panegyric. On the strength of this oath he throws off his disguise, and tells them who he is.

The description, in the last canto, of Laon's appearance as he goes to the stake is fine:

"His head and feet are bare, his hands are bound
Behind with heavy chains, yet none do wreak
Their scoffs on him, tho' myriads throng around;
There are no sneers upon his lips which speak
That scorn or hate has made him bold; his cheek
Resolve has not turn'd pale,—his eyes are mild
And calm, and like the morn about to break,
Smile on mankind—his heart seems reconciled
To all things and itself, like a reposing child."

The Tyrant's child pleads in vain for his life, and he mounts the pile ; but before the torches have kindled it, Cythna comes thundering in on her black steed, and the Tyrant and his slaves kneel before her in a panic, taking her for an angel of God. The Christian priest, however, recognizes her as the missing victim ; and Cythna, too weak to mount the pile herself, beckons to the mutes to lift her up.

> " She won them, tho' unwilling, her to bind
> Near me, among the snakes. When then had fled
> One soft reproach that was most thrilling kind,
> She smiled on me, and nothing then we said,
> But each upon the other's countenance fed
> Looks of insatiate love ; the mighty veil
> Which doth divide the living from the dead
> Was almost rent, the world grew dim and pale,—
> All light in heaven or earth beside our love did fail."

The last thing that Laon sees, before he swoons away in death, is the Tyrant's child, who falls suddenly without life or motion.

The poem concludes with a lovely description of the awaking of Laon and Cythna to their real life beyond the grave—that ideal world toward which their imaginations aspired while still on earth. They are no longer " confined and pestered in this pinfold here," but free in an atmosphere of light and love. The Tyrant's child, who turns out to be their own, meets them in one of Shelley's favourite moonlike boats, and wafts them to the great Temple of the Spirit, which the poet saw in vision in the first canto.

I could not better sum up the general characteristics of this poem, than by quoting what Mr. Rossetti too

modestly calls his "wretchedly inadequate" remarks in the memoir prefixed to his edition: "It was a great effort, and a near approach to a great poem; clearly, in more senses than one, greater than *Alastor*, though its vast scale and unmeasured ambition place it still more obviously in the category of imperfect achievements. Gorgeous ideality, humanitarian enthusiasm, and a passionate rush of invention, more especially of the horrible, go hand in hand in *The Revolt of Islam*. It affects the mind something like an enchanted palace of the *Arabian Nights*. One is wonderstruck both at the total creation, and at every shifting aspect of it; but one does not expect to find in it any detail of the absolute artistic perfection of a Greek gem, nor any inmate of consummate interest to the heart. Its flashing and sounding chambers are full of everything save what one most loves at last, repose and companionship."

"PRINCE ATHANASE."

Prince Athanase, though written at Marlow in 1817, is a maturer poem in many respects than *Laon and Cythna*. It is the first important instance of Shelley's employment of the *terza rima*, a metre in which he is always at his best, and which even here he wields with mastery. The plot, from what Mrs. Shelley tells us of it, would evidently have in some respects resembled that of *Epipsychidion*. Prince Athanase, a youth, like the Poet of *Alastor*, in search of the ideal, is deceived

by the Pandemian Venus in the shape of a fair woman; Venus Urania, whom he was seeking, appearing only in time to kiss his lips in death.

The opening lines of the poem present that picture of a youth with hoary hair, of which Shelley was so fond. This youth, Prince Athanase himself, though in the main his character is nothing more than that of the ordinary Shelleyan hero, always the same, whether named Lionel, Laon, or the Poet in *Alastor*, is drawn with much firmer and subtler lines than they. His woe is not the completely self-centred woe of the Poet in *Alastor;* and though he is not a redeemer of the world, like Laon, he has something of the enthusiasm of the reformer. It is in the description of his melancholy that Shelley introduces those finer touches which give reality to his character, and tend to differentiate him from the group of youthful idealists. The following passage, which tells how the canker of grief gradually ate into his soul, has something of the reality of a personal experience :—

"So spake they, idly of another's state
Babbling vain words and fond philosophy :
This was their consolation. Such debate
Men held with one another. Nor did he,
Like one who labours with a human woe,
Decline this talk : as if its theme might be
Another, not himself, he to and fro
Questioned and canvassed it with subtlest wit,
And none but those who loved him best could know
That which he knew not, how it galled and bit
His weary mind, this converse vain and cold ;
For, like an eyeless nightmare, grief did sit

Upon his being—a snake which fold by fold
Pressed out the life of life, a clinging fiend
Which clenched him if he stirred with deadlier hold ;—
And so his grief remained—let it remain—untold."

Prince Athanase is a link between the juvenile and the mature poems, resembling the former in the naïve idealism of its personages, but reaching forward to the latter in the subtlety of its thought, and in the delicate perfection of its language and the grave and limpid music of its verse.

CHAPTER IV.

"ROSALIND AND HELEN"—"JULIAN AND MADDALO"—"THE CENCI."

"ROSALIND AND HELEN."

THE principal poems produced in the year 1818, when Shelley was twenty-six, are *Rosalind and Helen*, the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, *Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples*, and the exquisite *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*. Of these, the first, *Rosalind and Helen*, is an attempt (feeble, for Shelley) to idealize real life—an idyll of the social oppressions of women. It was cast aside by the poet in disgust, and only finished at the particular request of his wife. The scene is laid by the shore of Lake Como, where Helen, accompanied by her little son Henry, suddenly meets her old friend Rosalind, who long since cast her off because she had lived with her lover, Lionel, without being married to him. Rosalind is now a desolate woman, and gladly responds to Helen's affectionate greeting. Helen sends away her boy, and the two reunited friends retire to a stone seat in a chestnut wood, to converse

without interruption. The opening of the poem has much delicate idyllic beauty; and the persons of the little drama, including even the boy, who speaks but thrice, move gracefully before the reader's eye. The description of the "deep lawny dell" in the "vast and antique wood"—where they find the stone seat beside a spring, just as the grey shades of evening are falling—is a lovely little bit of landscape, full of Shelleyan details. There is a tradition that this stone seat is haunted by a "hellish shape," which leads thither "the ghost of a youth with hoary hair"—that personage who seems to have haunted Shelley's imagination like his own spectre. His mind appears to have been at this time very full of the various aspects which the love of a brother for a sister might assume, for the poem thus proceeds:

> "The truth was worse;
> For here a sister and a brother
> Had solemnized a monstrous curse,
> Meeting in this fair solitude;
> For beneath yon very sky
> Had they resign'd to one another
> Body and soul. The multitude,
> Tracking them to the secret wood,
> Tore limb from limb their innocent child,
> And stabb'd and trampled on its mother;
> But the youth, for God's most holy grace,
> A priest saved to burn in the market-place."

In this haunted solitude, the friends tell each other their stories, which are not lacking in that lurid ghastliness of incident in which Shelley's somewhat morbid imagination delighted. Rosalind has loved intensely a youth to whom she is just about to be married, with her

mother's consent, when her father suddenly makes his appearance from "a distant land," rushes between them "with a loud and fearful cry," and tells them that the youth is her half-brother. The youth drops dead with a "wild laugh;" her father pines away and dies soon after, leaving his wife and daughter in poverty, and Rosalind marries to procure the comforts of life for her mother. The horrors of her life with a husband whom she loathes—

> "A man
> Hard, selfish, loving only gold,
> * * * *
> . . . a coward to the strong,
> . . . a tyrant to the weak,"

are described with Shelley's customary power. The birth of her children brings her some consolation:

> "For each, as it came, brought soothing tears,
> And a loosening warmth, as each one lay
> Sucking the sullen milk away,
> About my frozen heart did play."

The children, however, dread their father's voice and footstep:

> "The babe at my bosom was hush'd with fear
> If it thought it heard its father near;
> And my two wild boys would near my knee
> Cling, cow'd, and cowering fearfully."

At length he dies, to the undisguised delight of the children, and to the intense relief of the mother—a relief which she blushes to acknowledge to herself:

> "They laughed, for he was dead: but I
> Sate with a hard and tearless eye,

And with a heart which would deny
The secret joy it could not quell,
Low muttering o'er his loathèd name !
Till from that self-contention came
Remorse where sin was none ; a hell
Which in pure spirits should not dwell."

But fresh misery is in store for her :

"Even the dead
Have strength, their putrid shrouds within,
To blast and torture. Those who live
Still fear the living, but a corse
Is merciless."

By her husband's will, her children will be left destitute if ever she sees them again, or remains more than three days in her birthplace ; she being, as he says, an adulteress and an unbeliever. Accordingly she is forced to leave her children and go into exile.

Helen's story is of a more conventionally Shelleyan type. Her lover, Lionel, is another Laon, whom she has loved at a time, presumably about that of the French Revolution, when

"Men dream'd the aged earth
Was labouring in that mighty birth,
Which many a poet and a sage
Has aye foreseen—the happy age
When truth and love shall dwell below
Among the works and ways of men ;
Which on this world not power but will
Even now is wanting to fulfil."

Here again we have the doctrine of the power of the human will. The character of Lionel is beautifully sketched, and might stand for Shelley's own :

"To Lionel,
Though of great wealth and lineage high,
Yet through those dungeon walls there came
Thy thrilling light, O liberty!
And as the meteor's midnight flame
Startles the dreamer, sunlike truth
Flash'd on his visionary youth,
And filled him, not with love, but faith,
And hope, and courage mute in death;
For love and life in him were twins,
Born at one birth: in every other
First life, then love, its course begins,
Though they be children of one mother;
And so through this dark world they fleet
Divided, till in death they meet:
But he loved all things ever.
* * * * *
His words could bind
Like music the lull'd crowd, and stem
That torrent of unquiet dream,
Which mortals truth and reason deem,
But is revenge and fear and pride.
* * * * *
All men loved
Young Lionel, though few approved;
All but the priests;
* * * * *
For he made verses wild and queer
On the strange creeds priests hold so dear."

But the period of hope for mankind vanishes:

"None now hoped more. Grey Power was seated
Safely on her ancestral throne;
And Faith, the Python, undefeated,
Even to its blood-stain'd steps dragg'd on
Her foul and wounded train."

Lionel flies in despair to foreign lands, loves and is deceived, and returns heart-broken. Helen meets and

comforts him; but just as they are about to be united by a ritual of their own devising, he is seized and borne off to prison, from which he is released only to die in her arms after a lingering illness. Just before his death, he leads Helen to a temple sacred to Fidelity, built by his mother in memory of a dog that had died in saving her. There his mother's harp still stands, and, under his inspiration, Helen seizes it and pours forth a wonderful "wild song:"

> "His mother's harp stood near, and oft
> I had awaken'd music soft
> Amid its wires: the nightingale
> Was pausing in her heaven-taught tale:
> 'Now drain the cup,' said Lionel,
> 'Which the poet-bird has crown'd so well
> With the wine of her bright and liquid song!
> Heardst thou not sweet words among
> That heaven-resounding minstrelsy?
> Heardst thou not that those who die
> Awake in a world of ecstasy?
> That love, when the night of life is cloven,
> And thought, to the world's dim boundaries clinging,
> And music, when one beloved is singing,
> Is death? Let us drain right joyously
> The cup which the sweet bird fills for me.'"

Here again is that idea which so often recurs in Shelley's poetry, that death is the rending of a veil, a cleaving of the night of life, which admits us to the full daylight of the ideal, which alone is true life. As Helen's song dies away, Lionel sinks into her arms and dies also. Of course, "the ready lies of law" deprive Helen and her child of all the property left them by Lionel.

Having told each other their stories, Rosalind and Helen return to Helen's home, where Rosalind's sudden tears, falling on his face, wake Henry. Henceforward the friends dwell together, till Rosalind dies before her time, and is buried "on Chiavenna's precipice," where

> "They raised a pyramid of lasting ice,
> Whose polish'd sides, ere day had yet begun,
> Caught the first glow of the unrisen sun,
> The last when it had sunk; and thro' the night
> The charioteers of Arctos wheeled round
> Its glittering point, as seen from Helen's home."

Helen dies "among her kindred, being old;" and the poem concludes with the assurance that:

> "If love die not in the dead
> As in the living, none of mortal kind
> Are blest, as now Helen and Rosalind."

This idyll of two Shelleyan saints, beautiful as are many of the details, can scarcely be regarded as a complete success. As in *Laon and Cythna*, there is a want of even ideal probability in the incidents and the manner of their narration; yet Rosalind's story gives a vivid picture of the horrors of a loveless marriage to a woman capable of passion, and abounds in delicate touches of feminine feeling. The secrets of the maternal στοργὴ were never more tenderly and beautifully dealt with than they are here, even by Shelley himself.

"Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," etc.

In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* Shelley tantalizes us with one of those passionate appeals to an abstract personification which seems to imply that he believes in some veritable Spirit—some personal vital force in operation behind the mere phenomena of the visible world. This corresponds to what Goethe spoke of as the polytheism of his own poetry, and amounts to something more than a mere rhetorical personification of an object known to be inanimate. Here Shelley has the definite philosophic conception of a vital force above and outside himself, and yet in close relation with his own mind—a force which, under the name of Power or Spirit, he adores, much as a mystic might adore God. Such religion as he possesses is to be found here.

The first lines—

> "The awful shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats, though unseen, among us,"

recall the address of Prometheus to Asia, whom he calls the "shadow of beauty unbeheld." Asia, an incarnation of ideal Beauty, is also an incarnation of divine Love—a mediatress between the Spirit of Nature and the mind of man; and she may be regarded as a personification of this Intellectual Beauty which we here find playing the part of a Holy Spirit to Shelley—the inspirer of all that is great and good in his life. "Why," he asks, "are the visitations of this Spirit so transitory?"

"Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
Of human thought or form, where art thou gone?
Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?"

This is one of the great mysteries of life:

"No voice from some sublimer world hath ever
To sage or poet these responses given:
Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven,
Remain the records of their vain endeavour."

This last sentence, with its strange apposition of the words "Demon, Ghost, and Heaven," is rather puzzling. Possibly Shelley may have felt some resemblance between the visitations of this Spirit of Beauty to his own mind, and those of the demon to Socrates, and of the Holy Ghost to the mystics; and means to imply that we give names to this secret spiritual influence, without being able to tell "whence it cometh or whither it goeth." But, however vain these names may be as spells to resist the dominion of doubt, chance, and instability over this phenomenal world, the light alone of this Spirit gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream. And, in the next stanza, it is evident that Shelley believed that this Spirit, whatever it be, is a tremendous force in the universe:

"Man were immortal and omnipotent,
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart."

He, moreover, appears to use the word *immortal* in its

usual sense, and to connect faith in a life beyond the grave with the Spirit's presence :

> "Depart not, lest the grave should be,
> Like life and fear, a dark reality."

The next two stanzas simply and nobly describe the poet's devotion to this Spirit, to which his life has been and is consecrated :

> "While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
> Thro' many a listening chamber, cave, and ruin,
> And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
> Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
> I call'd on poisonous names with which our youth is fed :
> I was not heard : I saw them not :
> When musing deeply on the lot
> Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
> All vital things that wake to bring
> News of birds and blossoming,
> Sudden thy shadow fell on me :
> I shriek'd and clasp'd my hands in ecstasy !
>
> "I vow'd that I would dedicate my powers
> To thee and thine : have I not kept the vow ?
> With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
> I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
> Each from his voiceless grave : they have in vision'd bowers
> Of studious zeal or love's delight
> Outwatch'd with me the envious night :
> They know that never joy illumed my brow,
> Unlink'd with hope that thou wouldst free
> This world from its dark slavery,
> That thou, O awful Loveliness,
> Would'st give whate'er these words cannot express."

The same crisis in his spiritual life is, no doubt, alluded to in the dedication to *Laon and Cythna.*

In the *Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples* we hear the sigh of a calm lyrical despair—a mysterious despair, which has given rise to many conjectures as to its special cause; but which is, after all, merely the recurrence of a melancholy mood, which must have been familiar enough to the Poet of *Alastor*. Here, however, the complaint assumes a more definite and personal shape than is usual with Shelley; and it is not wonderful that the following stanza should have excited curiosity as to the immediate causes which could have induced such a mood:—

"Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
Nor peace within nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth
The sage in meditation found,
And walk'd with inward glory crown'd—
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
Others I see whom these surround—
Smiling they live and call life pleasure;
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure."

But surely we need scarcely assume the real existence of that mysterious lady, who had left her husband to pursue Shelley with her love, to account for such a wail.* The inner poetry of the poem dwells in this one lovely stanza, which follows on the wail:

"Yet now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care

* Yet Mr. Rossetti assures me that Miss Clairmont maintained that Shelley had told her this lady's name, and that she herself had seen her at Naples.

Which I have borne and yet must bear,
Till death like sleep might steal on me,
And I might feel in the warm air
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony."

autobiographical

"EUGANEAN HILLS."

The same deep melancholy permeates the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills;* but there is more poignant pain expressed in the wild music of the introductory lines, which fly restlessly onward, as that spiritual bark whose course they describe flies before the tempest of agony. In this poem Shelley is at his best. It has something of the imaginative grandeur of Beethoven's music. As odours awaken memories of half-forgotten scenes and emotions, these passionate lines might well raise in the reader's mind the ghosts of half-forgotten movements in the works of the great tone-poet, who lives, like Shelley, in an emotional atmosphere more spacious and ethereal than that of ordinary mortals.

The poet describes himself as

"Ever drifted on
O'er the unreposing wave
To the haven of the grave;"

and the next lines read like a bitter development of the assertion, in the *Stanzas written in Dejection*, that he has no love:

"What if there no friends will greet;
What if there no heart will meet
His with love's impatient beat;

Wander wheresoe'er he may,
Can he dream before that day
To find refuge from distress
In friendship's smile, in love's caress?
Then 'twill wreak him little woe
Whether such there be or no:
Senseless is the breast, and cold,
Which relenting love would fold;
Bloodless are the veins and chill
Which the pulse of pain did fill;
Every little living nerve
That from bitter words did swerve
Round the tortured lips and brow,
Are like sapless leaflets now
Frozen upon December's bough."

Then, by an emotional association of ideas, he proceeds to give a vivid picture of the desolate grave of a solitary wretch like himself:

"On the beach of a northern sea
Which tempests shake eternally,
As once the wretch there lay to sleep,
Lies a solitary heap,
One white skull and seven dry bones
On the margin of the stones,
Where a few grey rushes stand,
Boundaries of the sea and land."

But now, amid the Euganean hills, he has found a momentary relief from his misery—his bark has touched at one of the "flowering islands" which

"Lie
In the waters of wide agony."

And then follows one of the most glorious bits of ideal landscape-painting in words that exists in the English language—broad in its general features, delicately

touched in its details, and with that wonderful sense of atmosphere so characteristic of Shelley. It is, indeed, no more a *mere* piece of landscape-painting than a picture of Turner's. It is a vision of eternal beauty, revealed through the actual scene. The delicately musical words have a far-off serenity in their sound, which holds the imagination in a trance of solemn delight—a delight deepened with a touch of that awe, with no sense of gloom in it, awakened by the presence of things supremely beautiful rather than things sublime.

Looking on the "sun-girt city," Venice, which must some day sink back into the waves whence she sprang, and over which she held sway, the poet feels that she will then be "a less drear ruin" than she is now, with her

> "Conquest-branded brow
> Stooping to the slave of slaves."

Her towers, which he sees "quivering through aërial gold," are for him

> "Sepulchres where human forms
> Like pollution-nourish'd worms
> To the corpse of greatness cling,
> Murder'd and now mouldering."

If, when freedom wakes, Venice and the other cities of Italy do not repent of their sins and become free and freedom-loving, let them perish! Venice, so poor in memories, it seems will have one proud one to rescue her name from oblivion, that there, when exiled from his native land, dwelt Byron, who is thus splendidly characterized:

> "A tempest-cleaving swan
> Of the songs of Albion,

Driven from his ancestral streams
By the might of evil dreams,
Found a nest in thee ; and Ocean
Welcomed him with such emotion
That its joy grew his, and sprung
From his lips like music flung
O'er a mighty thunder-fit,
Chastening terror."

It is hard to refrain from making further quotations from this exquisite poem ; but the description of Padua among her harvested plains, or the yet more beautiful description of the coming of noon over

"The leaves unsodden
Where the infant frost has trodden
With his morning-winged feet,
Whose bright print is gleaming yet,"

might dispute for precedence with that splendid Homeric simile in which tyranny is likened to a Norway woodman extinguishing the spark which has already kindled the woods around him. The poem concludes by the poet's once more launching his bark upon the tempestuous sea of life, while

" Its ancient pilot, Pain,
Sits beside the helm again."

But he consoles himself with the thought that

" Other flowering isles must be
In the sea of life and agony,"

and that perhaps he may even now be sailing to some fortunate isle where, for him and those he loves, a "windless bower" may be built,

" Free from passion, pain, and guilt,"

to which "the polluting multitude" may be enticed and made enamoured of its divine climate.

> "And, the love which heals all strife
> Circling, like the breath of life,
> All things in that sweet abode
> With its own mild brotherhood,
> They, not it, would change; and soon
> Every sprite beneath the moon
> Would repent its envy vain,
> And the earth grow young again."

"JULIAN AND MADDALO."

In 1819 *Julian and Maddalo* and *The Cenci* were produced—the former another idyll of real life, full of delicate beauty; the latter, Shelley's one tragedy. *Julian and Maddalo* gives us one or two glimpses into the poet's philosophy of life at that period; and is in itself sufficient to refute Mr. Hutton's strange theory that Shelley was averse from the conception of *will* as a regenerating force in the world.* It is, as we have already seen, one of his favourite ideas that the power of man's will is almost omnipotent; and in the preface to this poem he describes himself (or Julian) as "passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind." This apparent belief in free-will, indeed, runs all through the poem. Julian declares that

> "'It is our will
> Which thus enchains us to permitted ill.

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* "Shelley's Poetical Mysticism:" *Literary Essays.*

We might be otherwise; we might be all
We dream of, happy, high, majestical.
Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek,
But in our minds? And if we were not weak,
Should we be less in deed than in desire?'
'Ay, if we were not weak—and we aspire,
How vainly! to be strong,' said Maddalo:
'You talk Utopia.'
'It remains to know,'
I then rejoined, 'and those who try may find
How strong the chains are which our spirits bind:
Brittle perchance as straw.'"

How Shelley and Godwin reconciled their philosophic doctrine of rigid necessity with this practical freedom of the will does not appear.

Julian and Maddalo is much more of a transcript from real life than *Rosalind and Helen*. Like it, it is a poem into which dialogue enters; but here the alternate narrative into which the dialogue passes in *Rosalind and Helen* is replaced by the broken soliloquy of the maniac which the friends overhear. Here also the dialogue has an exquisite setting of scenic description. The scene of the first conversation between Julian and Maddalo is the Lido, where they are taking their evening ride, and afterwards Count Maddalo's gondola. Each bit of landscape is touched with the rapid yet delicate mastery of a sketch of Turner's. The opening lines give in a few words the wild waste solitariness of the Lido, as it was in those days, and the freshness of the evening sea-breeze:

"I rode one evening with Count Maddalo
Upon the bank of land which breaks the flow
Of Adria towards Venice: a bare strand
Of hillocks, heap'd from ever-shifting sand,

Matted with thistles and amphibious weeds,
Such as from earth's embrace the salt ooze breeds,
Is this; an uninhabited seaside,
Which the lone fisher, when his nets are dried,
Abandons; and no other object breaks
The waste, but one dwarf tree and some few stakes
Broken and unrepair'd, and the tide makes
A narrow space of level sand thereon,
Where 'twas our wont to ride while day went down.
This ride was my delight. I love all waste
And solitary places; where we taste
The pleasure of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be:
And such was this wide ocean, and this shore
More barren than its billows: and yet more
Than all, with a remember'd friend I love
To ride as then I rode;—for the winds drove
The living spray along the sunny air
Into our faces; the blue heavens were bare,
Stripp'd to their depths by the awakening north;
And, from the waves, sound like delight broke forth,
Harmonizing with solitude, and sent
Into our hearts aërial merriment.'"

All this is utterly simple and colloquial—almost more so than if it were a passage from one of Shelley's own letters; yet it has all the charm, the seizing and possessing power, of poetry. The daintily selected phrases, in which exactly the right words flow together, themselves flow on in a rippling stream of fresh, easy, unaffected verse. Shelley's natural language was verse. His prose is often a little stiff, constrained, and with genteel eighteenth-century turns of expression in it; but his verse is always easy. In writing to Leigh Hunt about this poem, he recommends it to him as "in some degree consistent with your own ideas of the manner in

which poetry ought to be written;" and it is easy to imagine Hunt's making it the subject of one of his delightful *chats* in the *Indicator*, and purring over each little felicitous phrase, as he crooned it out to his reader. When, after describing the sand as "matted with thistles," Shelley proceeds with the imaginative generalization:

> "And amphibious weeds,
> Such as from earth's embrace the salt ooze breeds."

we may be sure that this latter phrase would be marked with the Indicator's most appreciative italics; while we should in a similar manner be made to feel the vital fitness of the words in the following pasage:—

> "For the winds drove
> The *living* spray *along the sunny air*
> Into our faces; the blue heavens were bare,
> *Stripped to their depths by the awakening north;*
> And, from the waves, *sound like delight broke forth*,
> Harmonizing with solitude, and *sent*
> *Into our hearts aërial merriment.*"

The "aërial merriment," surely deserves to be doubly underlined, as does that marvellously felicitous bit of word-painting in the *Euganean Hills*, in which the word *aërial* is similarly used to breathe into the substantive it qualifies the breath of a new life. There the towers of Venice are described as

> "Quivering through aërial gold"—

quite a Turneresque piece of atmospheric effect. The "sound like delight" breaking forth from the waves is, however, more in the spirit of Claude than of Turner. Turner never seems to have felt the deliciousness

of the fresh lap—lap—lapping of the small waves in the shallow inlets of sunny southern seas, as Claude did.

The portrait of Count Maddalo's child is, no doubt, an idealization of Byron's daughter Allegra, for whom Shelley had a warm affection, and who must have lived permanently in his imagination. It was she whom he saw shortly before his own death, in a vision which reminds one of Blake's of his dying brother—a naked child rising out of the sea, clapping her hands and beckoning; and here she inspires him with these delicately worded lines:—

> "A lovelier toy sweet Nature never made;
> A serious, subtle, wild, yet gentle being;
> Graceful without design, and unforeseeing;
> With eyes—O speak not of her eyes! which seem
> Twin mirrors of Italian heaven, yet gleam
> With such deep meaning as we never see
> But in the human countenance."

There is, moreover, a tender flattering of his imagination in the subsequent passage, in which she is described as grown into

> "A woman, such as it has been my doom
> To meet with few; a wonder of this earth,
> Where there is little of transcendant worth,—
> Like one of Shakespeare's women."

It is the spectacle of the child's innocent play that leads to the conversation respecting the power of the human will, already noticed; and it is Maddalo's ridicule of Julian's Utopianism which suggests their visit to the lunatic in the island madhouse:

> "I knew one like you,
> Who to this city came some months ago,

With whom I argued in this sort,—and he
Is now gone mad—and so he answered me,
Poor fellow !—But if you would like to go,
We'll visit him, and his wild talk will show
How vain are such aspiring theories."

The words "one like you," addressed to Julian, connect this mysterious maniac (said by Shelley in a letter to Hunt to be "in some degree a painting from nature, but, with regard to time and place, ideal") with the poet himself. Shelley depicts himself in his poems with even greater persistence than Byron ; and this victim of misfortune is one more piece of ideal self-portraiture. In Laon he depicts a man of his own type, happy in the perfect love of Cythna, and triumphant over evil in all its direst forms ; and in Lionel a man of the same type, almost shipwrecked by adverse circumstances—the failure of cherished hopes and the falsehood of a beloved woman—but saved at last by Helen's love. Here the shipwreck is complete—a false woman has made havoc of this "maniac's" heart and soul. It would seem, however, that the reason that this man goes thus helplessly to ruin is that he has not attained to a true philosophy of life. To Maddalo's assertion that his madness proves the vanity of his aspiring theories, Julian replies—

"I hope to prove the induction otherwise,
And that a want of that true theory still,
Which seeks a soul of goodness in things ill,
Or in himself or others, has thus bow'd
His being :—there are some by nature proud,
Who, patient in all else, demand but this—
To love and be beloved with gentleness :—
And being scorn'd, what wonder if they die
Some living death ? This is not destiny,
But man's own wilful ill."

Perhaps, therefore, we should look upon this madman as an unregenerate Shelleyan, self-centred like the Poet of *Alastor*, and thus the victim of his own ideality. If so, we may perhaps assume that the philosophic Julian would disapprove of his raving against destiny in this passage :

> "What Power delights to torture us ? I know
> That to myself I do not wholly owe
> What now I suffer, though in part I may," etc.

Yet this man, wrecked as he is, has not sunk to the level of the cynic. He complains, without a sneer :

> "Yet think not, though subdued (and I may well
> Say that I am subdued), that the full hell
> Within me would infect the untainted breast
> Of sacred nature with its own unrest ;
> As some perverted beings think to find
> In scorn or hate a medicine for the mind
> Which scorn or hate hath wounded.—O, how vain !
> The dagger heals not, but may rend again."

Here Shelley's own beautiful soul speaks from its purest depths. In the following passage, also, there is an accent of personal anguish, which, taken in connection with that allusion in *Epipsychidion* to the siren,

> "Whose voice was venom'd melody,"

makes us ask, What was the real love-tragedy of Shelley's life ? What was the origin of so many allusions to false friends and deceiving women ? To these questions there are, as yet, no satisfactory answers forthcoming.

> "It were
> A cruel punishment for one most cruel,
> If such can love, to make that love the fuel

Of the mind's hell—hate, scorn, remorse, despair :
But *me*, whose heart a stranger's tear might wear,
As water-drops the sandy fountain-stone ;
Who loved and pitied all things, and could moan
For woes which others hear not, and could see
The absent with the glass of phantasy,
And near the poor and trampled sit and weep,
Following the captive to his dungeon deep ;
Me, who am as a nerve o'er which do creep
The else-unfelt oppressions of this earth,
And was to thee the flame upon thy hearth,
When all beside was cold :—that thou on me
Should rain these plagues of blistering agony—
Such curses are from lips once eloquent
With love's too partial praise ! Let none relent
Who intend deeds too dreadful for a name
Henceforth, if an example for the same
They seek :—for thou on me look'dst so and so,
And didst speak thus and thus. I live to show
How much men bear and die not.

* * * * *

Thou wilt tell,
With the grimace of hate, how horrible
It was to meet my love when thine grew less," etc.

The personal bearing of such utterances as this will be more fitly discussed when we come to study *Epipsychidion*. The end of the maniac's story is left in mystery at the end of the poem. Julian, "after many years and many changes," comes back to Venice, and hears it from the lips of Maddalo's daughter:

" When I ask'd
Of the lorn maniac, she her memory task'd,
And told, as she had heard, the mournful tale :
'That the poor sufferer's health began to fail
Two years from my departure ; but that then
The lady who had left him came again ;
Her mien had been imperious, but she now

Look'd meek; perhaps remorse had brought her low.
Her coming made him better; and they stay'd
Together at my father's,—for I play'd,
As I remember, with the lady's shawl;
I might be six years old:—But, after all,
She left him.'
'Why, her heart must have been tough;
How did it end?'
'And was not this enough?
They met, they parted.'
'Child, is there no more?'
Something within that interval which bore
The stamp of *why* they parted, *how* they met;—
Yet, if thine aged eyes disdain to wet
Those wrinkled cheeks with youth's remember'd tears,
Ask me no more; but let the silent years
Be closed and cered over their memory,
As yon mute marble where their corpses lie.'
I urged and question'd still: she told me how
All happen'd—but the cold world shall not know."

Julian and Maddalo is the first of Shelley's longer poems which attains to anything like perfection of workmanship; and this it does just because it is so simple and utterly unartificial. Though permeated with his philosophy, it is not a philosophic poem of deliberate purpose. It is a thing exhaled, not fashioned—a poem born, not made, unique for charm of style as it is in subject. The story and the words in which it is told live with an inseparable life, and take gentle possession of the reader's imagination, almost before he is aware that he is under their spell.

"The Cenci."

So far we have seen but one phase of Shelley's genius. There is a certain monotony of idea in all the poems that we have yet studied. They all inculcate a certain philosophy of life, either in the form of fervid rhetoric, of didactic narrative, or in impassioned lyrical cries. *The Cenci* startles the reader into a completely new conception of the scope of Shelley's poetical power. This least dramatic of poets suddenly gives birth to a drama which has at least all the elements of tragic greatness. That he himself was perfectly conscious of the new departure is evident from what he says in dedicating the poem to Leigh Hunt:—"Those writings which I have hitherto published have been little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. I can also perceive in them the literary defects incidental to youth and impatience; they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be. The drama I now present to you is a sad reality; I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been."

In thus leaving his "visions," to plunge into the gloom of real history, Shelley still remains faithful to his own ideal of human life. What subject could give a more concentrated picture of the "oppressions of the earth" than this, of a pure soul caged about with evil, and baited to destruction? Beatrice, with Church, world, father, lover, and friend all against her, is

hemmed in like Clarissa Harlowe, but more horribly. Her absolute purity of soul breaks down under the concentrated shock. She achieves no redeeming martyrdom, but perishes with a cry of despair on her lips. In the preface Shelley thus characteristically points the moral of her fate, and shows that it is her imperfection which makes her a tragic character: "Undoubtedly no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner, she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered consists."

In another passage he clearly indicates the non-ethical character of Italian Catholicism: "Religion co-exists, as it were, in the mind of an Italian Catholic with a faith in that of which all men have the most certain knowledge. It is interwoven with the whole

fabric of life. It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connection with any one virtue."

It is strange to find Shelley speaking to Trelawny of *The Cenci*, a work apparently outside his customary range, as a slight performance: "I don't think much of it: it gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length." It was written at the Villa Valsovano, between May and August, 1819.

The Cenci is practically a drama with two persons; the two great antagonistic characters of Beatrice and her father are powerfully drawn, the subordinate ones more lightly sketched. The well-meaning but weak and conventional Cardinal Camillo, the cold and perfidious Orsino, the irresolute Giacomo, the gentle Bernardo, and the timid, affectionate Lucrezia, are, however, sufficiently discriminated for the author's main purpose; and the action proceeds simply and naturally from scene to scene. In fact, the workmanship of the whole drama is astonishingly perfect, especially for a first attempt, and gives a much higher idea of Shelley's artistic common sense than might be surmised from many passages in *Laon and Cythna*, and others of the earlier poems. He has shown wisdom in closely following the original narrative, which falls readily into dramatic form. The blank verse, while evidencing imaginative familiarity with the minor Elizabethans as well as with Shakespeare, whom he has boldly plagiarized in one or two passages, is yet essentially modern and Shelleyan. He tells us in the preface that he has avoided "mere poetry" with

great care; but while this is truly the case, and the verse moves on with an almost conversational ease, there is no lack of imaginative power in the turn of the phrases, especially in the more passionate speeches. The language throughout has that mysterious power of arresting attention and fixing itself in the reader's memory which characterizes what has been vividly and truly felt by the writer.

In the first act the reader is easily and naturally prepared for the main action of the piece. The first scene, between old Cenci and Cardinal Camillo, could not be better, as the opening of this drama of senile depravity. Not only is the abandoned cynicism of Cenci himself powerfully depicted, and contrasted with the cautious, time-serving respectability of the Cardinal, but the relations of the Pope with this wealthy sinner, whose crimes increase the revenues of the Church, are distinctly suggested. In the very first sentence Cardinal Camillo places this clearly before the reader's imagination:

> "That matter of the murder is hush'd up
> If you consent to yield his Holiness
> Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate."

"That matter of the murder"—a delightfully business-like way of alluding to the newest *peccadillo* of this erring son of the Church, which is to be charitably "hushed up"—for a consideration!

Then, when Count Cenci has cynically torn the veil from the nakedness of his bargain with the Pope, and the Cardinal, as in duty bound, gravely admonishes him

and bids him amend his life—how admirably Shelley has caught the grand Italian style of innuendo in his reply :

> " Cardinal,
> One thing, I pray you, recollect henceforth,
> And so we shall converse with less restraint.
> A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter :
> He was accustom'd to frequent my house ;
> So the next day *his* wife and daughter came
> And ask'd if I had seen him ; and I smiled :
> I think they never saw him any more."

To write a speech like this, without melodramatic exaggeration, is no small feat for a young dramatist, or even an old one.

The second scene, in which Beatrice appears with Orsino, though not to be compared with the first, as a piece of grand character-drawing, is finely conceived as a pendant to that. In the former scene the father stands before us in all the impudent malevolence of his triumphant iniquity. Here the daughter turns with half-distrustful trust to her only friend, whose deep, cold-blooded perfidy is revealed in his soliloquy when she departs. This despairing trust in the man whom she in her heart suspects, because she knows not where else to turn—this clutching at the sapless straw, Orsino, as she feels herself sinking deeper in the pitiless sea of misery in which she has long struggled to keep herself afloat, gives us at the outset a keen sense of her helplessness and friendlessness.

In the great third scene, the passion rises to the pitch of tragic horror ; the protagonists meet face to face for that final struggle which forms the main subject of the play. Except in the tragedies of Webster, it would be

difficult to find in the works of the secondary Elizabethans a scene more full of that weird horror in which they delighted, yet so natural and unstrained. Most of them —Ford, for instance—produce their effects by means of colours strong, but false. The actors are not men and women, but vague Titanic personages animated with ultra-human passions; the action takes place not on this earth, but in some sunless limbo which only such creatures inhabit. Here, for once, Shelley has got his feet upon the solid earth, and proves himself a true modern in his sense of reality, his grasp of the main facts of an historical period, and his power of rendering human character. The Elizabethans, as a rule, must rank far below our average novelists in these respects; and even Webster himself cannot compare with Shelley for delicacy and truth to nature. Count Cenci is a monster; but he is a monster such as we know and feel has been spawned from the mire of this actual world. We have not here the unnatural and barren horrors of a *Revenger's Tragedy* or *Fatal Dowry;* we have a page out of the true history of human passion.

Again, in this scene, the fiendish cynicism of old Cenci is pourtrayed with the absolute mastery of true dramatic inspiration. The hate which seems to boil and bubble in hideous, furtive laughter from the devil's caldron of his heart, is felt in every line of the speeches in which he exultantly proclaims to the horrified guests the joyful news of the death of his sons:

> "*2nd Guest.* Some most desired event,
> In which we all demand a common joy,
> Has brought us hither; let us hear it, Count.

Cenci. It is indeed a most desired event.
If, when a parent, from a parent's heart,
Lifts from this earth to the great Father of all
A prayer, both when he lays him down to sleep,
And when he rises up from dreaming it;
One supplication, one desire, one hope,
That he would grant a wish for his two sons,
Even all that he demands in their regard—
And suddenly, beyond his dearest hope,
It is accomplish'd, he should then rejoice,
And call his friends and kinsmen to a feast,
And task their love to grace his merriment,
Then honour me thus far—for I am he.
Beatrice (*to Lucretia*). Great God! how horrible! Some
dreadful ill
Must have befall'n my brothers.
Lucretia. Fear not, child;
He speaks too frankly.
Beatrice. Ah! my blood runs cold.
I fear that wicked laughter round his eye,
Which wrinkles up the skin even to the hair.
Cenci. Here are the letters brought from Salamanca;
Beatrice, read them to your mother. God,
I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform,
By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought.
My disobedient and rebellious sons
Are dead!—Why, dead!—What means this change of cheer?
You hear me not:—I tell you they are dead:
And they will need no food or raiment more:
The tapers that did light them the dark way
Are their last cost. The Pope, I think, will not
Expect I should maintain them in their coffins.
Rejoice with me—my heart is wondrous glad."

The second act merely carries on the action. Neither Beatrice nor Giacomo can obtain any redress from the Pope, who tells Cardinal Camillo—

"In the great war between the old and young
I, who have white hairs and a tottering body,
Will keep at least blameless neutrality."

Orsino, for his own purposes, encourages Giacomo to harbour the idea of murdering his father, and this leads to the action of the third act. All this is skilfully dealt with in the play; but the act is a subordinate one. Shelley shows no lack of dramatic power in managing his minor *dramatis personæ*, and the characters of Giacomo and Orsino are distinctly brought out in their speeches.

The first scene of the third act, which presents Beatrice in the first frenzy of her horror at the atrocious outrage which has been perpetrated upon her, though with some lapses from perfect inspiration, is, on the whole, a fine one. The sense of shame beyond all shame, and despair beyond all despair, which removes her from the sphere of ordinary humanity, like the Woman in *Laon and Cythna* who calls herself Pestilence, takes a palpable physical form, and plagues her very organs of sense with morbid sensations:

> "My God!
> The beautiful blue heaven is fleck'd with blood!
> The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
> Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe
> In charnel pits! Pah! I am choked! There creeps
> A clinging, black, contaminating mist
> About me—'tis substantial, heavy, thick;
> I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
> My fingers and my limbs to one another,
> And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
> My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
> The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!
> My God! I never knew what the mad felt
> Before; for I am mad, beyond all doubt."

But she is not mad; she remains miserably sane in

the midst of her frenzy, clinging still to her faith in the existence of God :

> " Many might doubt there were a God above
> Who sees and permits evil, and so die :
> That faith no agony shall obscure in me."

In the subsequent progress of the scene, after Orsino enters, there is a tragic grandeur in the manner in which, after a pause in which she communes with her own conscience, she comes to the determination from which she never swerves—that it is right that Count Cenci shall no longer pollute the earth with his vile presence. She advances, like an arch-priestess of Nemesis, cutting short the colloquy between Orsino and Lucretia, as she speaks—

> " Peace, Orsino !
> And, honour'd Lady, while I speak, I pray
> That you put off, as garments overworn,
> Forbearance and respect, remorse and fear,
> And all the fit restraints of daily life,
> Which have been borne from childhood, but which now
> Would be a mockery to my holier plea.
> As I have said, I have endured a wrong,
> Which, though it be expressionless, is such,
> As asks atonement ; both for what is past,
> And lest I be reserved, day after day,
> To load with crimes an overburthen'd soul,
> And be—what ye can dream not. I have pray'd
> To God, and I have talk'd with my own heart,
> And have unravell'd my entangled will,
> And have at length determined what is right.
> Art thou my friend, Orsino ? False or true ?
> Pledge thy salvation ere I speak.
> *Orsino.* I swear
> To dedicate my cunning, and my strength,
> My silence, and whatever else is mine,
> To thy commands.

Lucretia. You think we should devise
His death?
Beatrice. And execute what is devised,
And suddenly. We must be brief and bold."

Perhaps it is presumptuous to say that the forestallment of Beatrice's doom by Lucretia, though the latter may be supposed to read it in her face, rather weakens the climax of Beatrice's speech. There seems to be no authority for printing the passage thus:

"*Lucretia.* You think we should devise——
Beatrice. His death—and execute what is devised,"

yet such a reading would seem to agree better with the timid and dependent character of Lucretia, while marking the firm resolve of Beatrice.

The scene ends finally with the meeting between Beatrice and Giacomo, each having separately come to the same terrible determination:

"*Beatrice.* 'Tis my brother's voice! You know me not?
Giacomo. My sister, my lost sister!
Beatrice. Lost indeed!
I see Orsino has talk'd with you, and
That you conjecture things too horrible
To speak, yet far less than the truth. Now, stay not,
He might return: yet kiss me; I shall know
That then thou hast consented to his death.
Farewell, farewell! Let piety to God,
Brotherly love, justice and clemency,
And all things that make tender hardest hearts,
Make thine hard, brother. Answer not—farewell!"

The midnight soliloquy of Giacomo, who waits for the news of his father's death, yet dreads to hear it, is full of imaginative poetry, and produces a sensation like the awful hush that precedes a thunderstorm. Although

the entry of Orsino breaks in upon this trance with the announcement that the plot has failed, and Cenci still lives, it prepares the mind for the actual catastrophe.

In the next act this darkest of tragedies reaches its hideous climax in the murder of old Cenci; and Shelley's power rises with the necessity for its exercise. It is not too much to say that, with the exception of the scenes in *Macbeth*, on which it is partly founded, there is nothing in the whole range of Elizabethan drama grander in its weird horror than this fourth act of *The Cenci*. Old Cenci has got past the stage of ironic cynicism, and rages on in the mad glee of his irrestrainable wickedness. Shelley has caught the spirit of the Renaissance, in its most hellish mood of exuberant licentiousness, in the last scene in which he appears alive. His ripe malevolence has fermented into the most poisonous wine of hatred. His enormous lust after new and unheard-of sin can scarcely find words wild enough, or deeds black enough, to satisfy its thirst. When he has driven the trembling Lucretia's solicitude for his soul from her mind by the sheer force of his rancorous threats and his last tremendous curse on Beatrice, he gives vent to a final transport of ogreish joy:

> "I do not feel as if I were a man,
> But like a fiend appointed to chastise
> The offences of some unremember'd world.
> My blood is running up and down my veins;
> A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle:
> I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe;
> My heart is beating with an expectation
> Of horrid joy."

In the murder scene Beatrice is still the passionless Nemesis. Her soul has become the sharp sword of justice wielded by her pitiless heart. She acts the part of Lady Macbeth to the abashed murderers, when they fly from the chamber with the deed still undone:

"Miserable slaves!
Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man,
Found ye the boldness to return to me
With such a deed undone? Base palterers!
Cowards and traitors! Why, the very conscience
Which ye would sell for gold and for revenge
Is an equivocation: it sleeps over
A thousand daily acts disgracing men;
And when a deed where mercy insults Heaven—
Why do I talk?
[*Snatching a dagger from one of them and raising it.*
Hadst thou a tongue to say
She murder'd her own father, I must do it!
But never dream ye shall outlive him long!"

Her consciousness of relief at the moment the murder is committed is grandly conceived:

"*Lucretia.* Would it were done!
Beatrice. Even whilst
That doubt is passing through your mind, the world
Is conscious of a change. Darkness and hell
Have swallow'd up the vapour they sent forth
To blacken the sweet light of life. My breath
Comes, methinks, lighter, and the jellied blood
Runs freely thro' my veins."

Grand also in her assertion of her innocence when arrested by the Pope's Legate:

"Guilty! Who dares talk of guilt? My Lord,
I am more innocent of parricide
Than is a child born fatherless."

This fiercely parodoxical assertion of innocence becomes terrible in the trial scene in the fifth act, when she confronts Marzio and shames him into heroism; when, after a solemn adjuration, she directly asks him if she is guilty:

"*Beatrice.* Am I, or am I not
A parricide?
Marzio. Thou art not!
Judge. What is this?
Marzio. I here declare those whom I did accuse
Are innocent. 'Tis I alone am guilty.
Judge. Drag him away to torments; let them be
Subtle and long drawn out, to tear the folds
Of the heart's inmost cell. Unbind him not
Till he confess.
Marzio. Torture me as ye will:
A keener pang has wrung a higher truth
From my last breath. She is most innocent!
Bloodhounds, not men, glut yourselves well with me!
I will not give you that fine piece of nature
To rend and ruin."

The conclusion of the play is worthy of its splendid opening. The character of Beatrice rises to sublimity at the end, as her father's did at the beginning. From the awful throne of her spiritual woe, she looks down upon the small sufferings that have terrors for ordinary mortals, and laughs the rack to scorn:

"Tortures! Turn
The rack henceforth into a spinning-wheel!
Torture your dog, that he may tell when last
He lapp'd the blood his master shed—not me!
My pangs are of the mind, and of the heart,
And of the soul; ay, of the inmost soul,
Which weeps within tears as of burning gall
To see, in this ill world where none are true,
My kindred false to their deserted selves."

In her song in the end of the third scene, Shelley has caught something of the sombre beauty of the songs of the old dramatists. It is quite out of his usual style, but perfect of its kind.

The last scene, which opens with Camillo's significant comparison of the Pope to

> "The engine
> Which tortures and which kills, exempt itself
> From aught that it inflicts,"

shows us the final agony of Beatrice's soul. What a bleak shiver is in her words, as she wildly faces that last ghastly fear!

> "Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
> No God, no heaven, no earth in the void world;
> The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!
> If all things then should be—my father's spirit,
> His eye, his voice, his touch surrounding me;
> The atmosphere and breath of my dead life!"

Then, when poor, clinging Lucretia counsels her to

> "Trust in God's sweet love.
> The tender promises of Christ: ere night
> Think we shall be in Paradise,"

what an agony of freezing tears there is in her reply:

> "'Tis past!
> Whatever comes, my heart shall sink no more.
> And yet, I know not why, your words strike chill:
> How tedious, false, and cold seem all things! I
> Have met with much injustice in this world;
> No difference has been made by God or man,
> Or any power moulding my wretched lot,
> 'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.
> I am cut off from the only world I know,

From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet prime.
You do well telling me to trust in God;
I hope I do trust in him. In whom else
Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold."

The hope of life she shudderingly puts from her, like a dying child that instinctively turns from a nauseous potion.

"*Lucretia.* Child, perhaps
It will be granted. We may all then live
To make these woes a tale for distant years:
O, what a thought! It gushes to my heart
Like the warm blood.
Beatrice. Yet both will soon be cold.
O, trample out that thought! Worse than despair,
Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope:
It is the only ill which can find place
Upon the giddy, sharp, and narrow hour
Tottering beneath us."

The Medusa-face of her cruel stepmother, Life, has not completely petrified her. She still suffers in the process of petrification. Her last words are exhaled like a gentle sigh from her out-wearied heart:

"Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, mother, tie
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
In any simple knot: ay, that does well.
And yours I see is coming down. How often
Have we done this for one another! now
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well."

The slightly petulant tone which pervades these last speeches of Beatrice, wearied as she is with injustice and weakened with torture, is a clear proof of Shelley's perfect dramatic inspiration. To find anything as

delicately true to nature we must go to Shakespeare. The characters of Beatrice and her father are, indeed, evidence of a power of individual portraiture far above that which we find in the ordinary Elizabethan drama.

The fault of Beatrice, according to Shelleyan ethics, was that proud impatience which led her to take the punishment of her father's crimes upon herself, instead of leaving them to eternal justice, which was just about to strike. The Pope's officers arrive with a warrant for old Cenci's death just after the murder is perpetrated; and Beatrice surrenders her highest human prerogative of forgiving sins for the lower one of avenging them.

It is not likely that *The Cenci* will ever be a successful stage-play; even if the remote possibility, that an English tragic stage may again come into existence, be realized. There is nothing in the mere construction of the play to make it ineffective, and there are many scenes full of splendid dramatic passion, which only want actors of real tragic power to give them life; but the motive of the play is too horrible, and the scenes move through too dark a monotony of unfamiliar misery to be interesting to the general public. *The Cenci* will, however, remain among the greatest works of our non-Shakespearean dramatic literature, and a most astonishing document of the versatility of our greatest lyrical poet's genius.

CHAPTER V.

"PROMETHEUS UNBOUND," ACTS I. AND II.

THE years 1818 and 1819, when Shelley was drinking in the first inspiration of the spirit of Italy, were the years of his greatest poetical achievement. *The Cenci*, great as it is, was but an episodical performance thrown off while his mind was in labour with a greater work, *Prometheus Unbound*. The conception of this seems to have come to him almost on his first arrival in Italy.

"The first aspect of Italy," says Mrs. Shelley, "enchanted Shelley; it seemed a garden of delight placed beneath a clearer and brighter heaven than any he had lived under before. . . . The poetical spirit within him speedily revived, with all the power and with more than all the beauty of his first attempts. He meditated three subjects as the groundwork for lyrical dramas. One was the story of Tasso; of this a slight fragment of a song of Tasso remains. The other was founded on the *Book of Job*, which he never abandoned in idea, but of which no trace remains among his papers. The

third was the *Prometheus Unbound*." In the spring of 1819 he gave himself up to the composition of this poem, portions of which were already written, and completed it in three acts; the fourth, an afterthought, being added in the autumn, after *The Cenci* had come into existence. The first three acts were written in Rome, chiefly in the Baths of Caracalla—then a leafy and flowery wilderness, undesecrated by the prosaic antiquarianism of Signor Rosa and his myrmidons; the last in Florence.

Mrs. Shelley's account of her husband's theory of life, given in her note on the *Prometheus*, is valuable as affording some slight clue to the philosophy of the poem. "The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was, that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled. This also forms a portion of Christianity; God made earth and man perfect, till he, by his fall,

'Brought death into the world and all our woe.'

Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none. It is not my part in these notes to notice the arguments that have been urged against this opinion, but to mention the fact that he entertained it, and was indeed attached to it with fervent enthusiasm. That man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system. And the subject he loved best to dwell on was the image of One warring with

the Evil Principle, oppressed not only by it, but by all—even the good, who were deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity,—a victim full of fortitude and hope, and the spirit of triumph, emanating from a reliance on the ultimate omnipotence of good. Such he had depicted in his last poem, when he made Laon the enemy and the victim of tyrants. He now took a more idealized image of the same subject."

Prometheus Unbound is the sublimated essence of Shelley's lyrical genius. In it we have the ripe fruit of his early manhood. "My *Prometheus*," he says himself, "is, in my judgment, of a higher character than anything I have yet attempted, and is perhaps less of an imitation of anything that has gone before it. . . . It has no resemblance to the Greek drama; it is original, and has cost me severe labour." He is right in his estimate of this poem, which, like Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, was written for his own delight, not for the world. It is to all other lyrical poems what the Ninth Symphony is to all other symphonies; and more than this, for Shelley has here outsoared himself more unquestionably than Beethoven in his last great orchestral work. *Prometheus Unbound* is the supreme English poem of the nineteenth century, and must finally rank beside *King Lear*, being as unrivalled in its own sphere, which can scarcely be called a lower, though an immensely narrower one.

Adequately to speak of this great work, criticism should become poetry; and little more than an outline of its mythical philosophy can be here attempted. In *Queen Mab* the crude rudiments of this philosophy

already exist; but there we have a specimen of that didactic poetry which, in the preface to *Prometheus*, he declares to be his "abhorrence." There we have something of that "reasoned system on the theory of human life" which he now abjures; here we have abstract philosophical conceptions vitalized into myths of the highest poetical beauty.

Shelley has been loosely called a mystical poet. His *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, which lacks the true mystic's sense of dependence upon a loving Father, expresses his closest approach to mysticism; but, like the mystics, he lives in the world of spiritual intuitions, and clothes metaphysical abstractions in a mythical form. In this he closely approaches our great modern mytho-poet, Blake, whose philosophy, if less intelligible and less sane than Shelley's, was perhaps deeper. Blake's myths, so original and so stupendous in their gloom and their beauty, are akin to the sacred visions of the Hebrew seers; Shelley's are the modern equivalent of the intellectual myths of the Greek mythology; and he more nearly approaches the Greek method of using natural phenomena as symbols of vital forces underlying nature and analogous to the powers of the human mind, and, conversely, of personifying the vital forces of nature, than Goethe does in the second part of *Faust*. While Goethe has failed to vitalize his personifications and transmute philosophy into poetry, Shelley has splendidly succeeded. "More popular poets," says Mrs. Shelley, "clothe the ideal with familiar and sensible imagery. Shelley loved to idealize the real—to gift the mechanism

of the material universe with a soul and a voice, and to bestow such also on the most delicate and abstract emotions and thoughts of the mind. Sophocles was his great master in this species of imagery."

The Titan Prometheus is the incarnation of the genius of humanity, chained and suffering under the tyranny of the evil principle which at present rules over the world, typified in Jupiter; the name Prometheus, *foresight*, connecting him with that poetic imagination which is the true prophetic power, penetrating the mystery of things, because, as Shelley implies, it is a kind of divine Logos incarnate in man—a creative force which dominates nature by acting in harmony with her. It is remarkable that he makes Jupiter, the evil principle, derive his power over mankind from Prometheus, whose throne he has usurped:

> "I gave all
> He has; and in return he chains me here
> Years, ages, night and day; whether the sun
> Split my parch'd skin, or in the moony night
> The crystal-winged snow cling round my hair:
> Whilst my beloved race is trampled down
> By his thought-executing ministers."

This Jupiter, "the Prince of this world," the embodiment of tyranny, false religion, evil custom, is, in his most familiar form, "the letter that killeth"—authority, orthodoxy, the petrified dogma which hinders the play of free thought, the obsolete or hypocritical code of morality which enslaves the soul; as Prometheus is "the spirit that giveth life." To accept anything less than the highest ideal as absolute and final is, for Shelley, the sin of sins.

Yet it is the human genius itself that has forged the bonds which restrain it, and against which it rebels.

In this poem Shelley appears to have conceived of evil as arrest, abortion, retrogression, anachronism; the persistence of an obsolete something, a lifeless husk, a withering leaf upon the Tree of Life, which must disappear when the flowering time of Eternity is fully come. Accordingly, we find that there is a terrible slumbering power, lying in wait for Jupiter somewhere in the dark abyss of Eternity: *Demogorgon* (which Shelley might possibly translate, according to an obvious, though unsound, etymology, "the grim one of the people"), begotten by Jove himself,—a spirit of rebellion stirred up by the spirit of tyranny, and disappearing with it for ever when it has dethroned its father. But this grim one is something more than this. Jupiter has apparently begotten him; yet he tells his father that his name is Eternity, and bids him "demand no direr name." He is, if we dare conjecture, nothing less than Divine Justice itself—the eternal Nemesis which pursues crime, —that Something in the universe which inexorably decides that *this* has fallen short of typical perfection and must perish, that *that* has had its season and must pass away; and we may probably connect him with that all-powerful "reason," or moral necessity, which plays such an important part in Godwin's *Political Justice*. In the end he reappears as "the perfect law of liberty"—that law of which no jot or tittle shall pass till all be fulfilled, but of which love *is* the fulfilment; and it is as such, and not as the mere spirit of rebellion, that he dethrones the

tyrannic and slavish law of the "Prince of this world," whose motive force is fear.

The sublime opening-scene of the poem, in which morning slowly breaks upon the peaks of Caucasus, introduces us to the suffering Titan,

"Nail'd to a wall of eagle-baffling mountain,"

and bearing all the torments that the malignity of Jove can inflict. Prometheus, as the genius of humanity, contains within himself not only the masculine element, with its boundless aspiration, indomitable energy of creative power, and unflinching endurance, but the feminine element, with its measureless self-surrender and self-devotion, without which this glorious masculine force degenerates into selfish pride, like that of Milton's Satan. At his feet sit the Oceanides, Panthea and Ione, sisters of his consort Asia, who is in exile in a lonely vale of the Indian Caucasus. These three sisters, whose happiness is so closely bound up with that of Prometheus, typify the spiritual forces of the universe, which are also cardinal virtues of the human mind. Shelley, like the Christian mystics, looked upon the external world as intimately connected with, and even dependent upon, the soul of man; all creation groaning and travailing in harmony with the agony of humanity. Panthea is the spirit of divine wisdom, seeing into the truth of things with intense courageous insight; or, in brief, if we may use a word so hateful to Shelley, *faith*. Ione is the spirit of eager forward-looking desire, or *hope;* her name being connected with that of the violet, Shelley's flower of hope, and therefore the most ap-

propriate flower for his tomb, where indeed, spring after spring, many an

> "Odorous violet,
> While yet its leaves with nightly dews are wet,
> Breathes in prophetic dreams of day's uprise."

Asia, the greatest of the three, is the spirit of divine beauty and love—at once the exciter and reciprocator of all pure passion. She is the life of life; the ideal which we passionately seek, and which seeks us with equal ardour; the something invisible which is revealed through the visible; the redeeming grace which gives victory over evil, making evil itself work out a higher good; the supreme something beyond, after which the creative imagination of the Creator perpetually aspires.

In *Queen Mab* Shelley's idea of the perfectionment of man was a comparatively simple one—the mere recurrence to a primitive state of nature. In *Prometheus Unbound* he has arrived at a more complex conception, which is more analogous to an evolutionary theory of life. Hence we must here distinguish between the two golden ages—the Saturnian, of instinctive union with the Spirit of Nature, corresponding to the first marriage of Prometheus with Asia; and the Promethean, of self-conscious, rational conformance with the ideal, corresponding to their second marriage after the Titan is unbound. To quote again from Mrs. Shelley's valuable notes: "He followed certain classical authorities in figuring Saturn as the good principle, Jupiter the usurping evil one, and Prometheus as the

regenerator, who, unable to bring mankind back to primitive innocence, used knowledge as a weapon to defeat evil, by leading mankind beyond the state wherein they are sinless through ignorance, to that in which they are virtuous through wisdom. . . . Asia, one of the Oceanides, is the wife of Prometheus—she was, according to other mythological interpretations, the same as Venus and Nature. When the benefactor of mankind is liberated, Nature resumes the beauty of her prime, and is united to her husband, the emblem of the human race, in perfect and happy union." Mr. Symonds rightly connects Asia with the "Intellectual Beauty" of the *Hymn*, and endeavours to harmonize the various aspects which she assumes in the drama, puzzling the reader who attempts to fathom the essence of her being, by appearing to him now as Beauty, now as Love, now as Nature. "She is the idea of Beauty incarnate, the shadow of the Light of Life which sustains the world and enkindles it with love, the reality of Alastor's vision, the breathing image of the awful loveliness apostrophised in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, the reflex of the splendour of which Adonais was a part. The essential thought of Shelley's creed was that the universe is penetrated, vitalized, made real by a spirit, which he sometimes called the Spirit of Nature, but which is always conceived as more than Life, as that which gives actuality to Life, and, lastly, as Love and Beauty. To adore this spirit, to clasp it with affection, and to blend with it, is, he thought, the true object of man. Therefore the final union of Prometheus with Asia is the consum-

mation of human destinies." The dependence of Asia upon Prometheus is one of the deepest mysteries of the Shelleyan philosophy. To comprehend it we must understand that Shelley, like Blake, regarded the human imagination as a divine creative force, a portion of that which creates and sustains the universe. Prometheus is, therefore, not merely the spirit of humanity ; he is the divine imagination, the father-force, which creates and re-creates the universe by its marriage with the divine idea, or mother-force, Asia.

> "Asia ! who, when my being overflow'd,
> Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine,
> Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust."

The long sufferings of Prometheus, which result from the usurpation of evil—the retarding power which withers and destroys his work by regarding it as fixed and final—end when Asia becomes so transfigured that evil can no longer endure the light of her beauty ; or, in other words, when the divine idea which gave birth to the old world is ready to give birth to a new one more perfect. Then Jupiter falls ; Prometheus is unbound by Hercules, the power by which the divine reason in the fulness of time rends the fetters of the creative force ; and the new nuptials of Prometheus and Asia give birth to the new world fairer than the old. This is the ever-renewed drama of creation, which, acted a million times in a second, eludes our vision in the mysteries of what we call chemical affinity, and which, extending over millions of ages, baffles the utmost range of our minds. In the bursting of a crocus bud in spring, no iess than

in the awakening of men's minds to a great social revolution, Prometheus is unbound. When the pollen dust of an orchis, borne on the tongue of some bee, meets the sporules in the ovary of a flower of the same species; when the nebulous sporules of the great flower of the universe, which we call planets, lie ages upon ages in the fertilizing embrace of those fiery pollen-grains, the stars; no less than when mortal lovers meet, or the soul of the sage or poet thrills as it clasps some divine idea, Prometheus and Asia are united.

Act I.

The poem opens with a great cry of anguish from Prometheus, who still refuses to do homage to Jupiter, knowing that, however slow the progress of the "wingless, crawling hours," one of them shall drag the tyrant from his throne. He hates him no longer:

> "I speak in grief,
> Not exultation, for I hate no more,
> As then ere misery made me wise."

He accordingly revokes the curse he pronounced upon him in the first rage of his torment. This is quite in accordance with Shelley's earliest principles, learnt from Godwin, as expressed in the notes to *Queen Mab*: "A necessarian is inconsequent to his own principles, if he indulges in hatred or contempt; the compassion which he feels for the criminal is unmixed with a desire of injuring him." The former curse of Prometheus typifies the blind rage against evil of uncivilized man-

kind, in whom reason is imperfectly developed. The evocation of the phantasm of Jupiter to re-utter this curse is one of the obscurest and least satisfactory parts of the poem. The meaning may, perhaps, be that past history still lives in a sort of phantasmal world, and speaks when evoked by the human imagination. There is a sombre and mysterious solemnity in the first words of the Earth respecting this phantasmal world, which thrills the mind with a supernatural awe :

> " Ere Babylon was dust,
> The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child,
> Met his own image walking in the garden.
> That apparition, sole of men, he saw."

This recalls that terrible vision of his own spectre which appeared to Shelley himself, and left him with the ominous words, " *Siete soddisfatto?* "

The solitary complaint of Prometheus, and his colloquy with his mother, the Earth, and with the airy voices from the mountains, the springs, the air, and the whirlwinds, form a fit prelude to this magnificent drama, in which dæmons are the *dramatis personæ* and universal nature the stage on which they play their parts—a prelude which fills the mind with a solemn elemental melancholy, and, like the opening movement of a great symphony, seems to make it free of time and space ; and the exquisite lyrics in which Ione and Panthea first speak are a foretaste of the ethereal music which makes this poem like Prospero's enchanted island :

> " The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not."

Prometheus revokes the curse, to the horror of the Earth, who thinks her champion vanquished :

" *The Earth.*

Misery, oh misery to me,
That Jove at length should vanquish thee.
Wail, howl aloud, Land and Sea,
The Earth's rent heart shall answer ye.
Howl, Spirits of the living and the dead,
Your refuge, your defence, lies fallen and vanquishèd.

First Echo.

Lies fallen and vanquishèd.

Second Echo.

Fallen and vanquishèd ! "

The Earth has not yet faith to receive the Shelleyan (or Christian) doctrine that evil is not to be overcome by evil. The wonderfully solemn cadence of despair produced by the double echo of the Earth's last words, is an early instance of those delicate tricks of verse in which Shelley revels all through this, his poem of poems. You can almost hear the sob of Earth's hopeless anguish dying away in sullen echoes through the wild gorges of Caucasus.

Scarcely is the curse revoked, when Mercury (who represents the Spirit of Compromise) appears with a flock of Furies, who fasten upon Prometheus when Mercury fails to persuade him to submit. These Furies, whose coming is described by Ione in that splendid image, so unintelligible as a mere picture, yet so full of imaginative horror—

" They come, they come,
Blackening the birth of day with countless wings,
And hollow underneath, like death,"

are the ministers of despair and remorse, who wring with mysterious agony the conscience of the heretic and the reformer, confusing his vision until he sees himself but the fountain of new evil. They conceal from him the ultimate issues of his work, and force him to fix his eyes upon the anarchy which must apparently be its first consequence :

> "Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou waken'dst for man?
> Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran
> Those perishing waters ; a thirst of fierce fever,
> Hope, love, doubt, desire, which consume him for ever."

While they remain, Prometheus is in the very Gethsemane of the spirit ; the bloody sweat of the penultimate struggle is upon him :

> "Drops of bloody agony flow
> From his white and quivering brow."

And that Shelley distinctly connects him with Christ, the mystery of whose agony in the garden he has here in a measure sounded, is evident from the passage which occurs after all the Furies have vanished except one—the last and direst; when even Panthea's courage fails, and, having seen the awful vision of

> "A youth
> With patient looks nail'd to a crucifix,"

she hides her face, as Ione had done before, and leaves Prometheus to bear his final passion alone :

> "*Fury.*
> Behold an emblem : those who do endure
> Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap
> Thousandfold torment on themselves and him.

Prometheus.

Remit the anguish of that lighted stare ;
Close those wan lips ; let that thorn-wounded brow
Stream not with blood ; it mingles with thy tears !
Fix, fix those tortured orbs in peace and death,
So thy sick throes shake not that crucifix,
So those pale fingers play not with thy gore !
O horrible ! Thy name I will not speak,
It hath become a curse. I see, I see
The wise, the mild, the lofty, and the just,
Whom thy slaves hate for being like to thee,
Some hunted by foul lies from their heart's home,
An early chosen, late-lamented home,
As hooded ounces cling to the driven hind ;
Some linked to corpses in unwholesome cells :
Some—hear I not the multitude laugh loud ?—
Impaled in lingering fire : and mighty realms
Float by my feet, like sea-uprooted isles,
Whose sons are kneaded down in common blood
By the red light of their own burning homes."

The last Fury vanishes when Prometheus expresses his pity for those who are not tortured by the recital of the miseries which men ignorantly inflict upon each other ; and it is noteworthy that the Fury's last and worst words are a simple unimpassioned statement of the every-day facts of life :

" *Fury.*

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
The powerful goodness want : worse need for them.
The wise want love ; and those who love want wisdom ;
And all best things are thus confused to ill.
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,
But live among their suffering fellow-men
As if none felt : they know not what they do.

Prometheus.

Thy words are like a cloud of winged snakes ;
And yet I pity those they torture not.

Fury.

Thou pitiest then? I speak no more! [*Vanishes.*"

To feel the full bitterness of the Fury's words, which are but an expansion of the lines in *Julian and Maddalo*—

"'Ay, if we were not weak,—and we aspire
How vainly to be strong,' said Maddalo:
'You talk Utopia,'"

one should be, like Shelley,

"As a nerve o'er which do creep
The else-unfelt oppressions of this earth."

Yet it is truly the dull prosaic evils of every-day life which clog the wings of our souls and blind their eyes, as dust defiles our skins and chokes our lungs; thus most effectually hindering us in our pursuit of ideal perfection. We shut our eyes and stop our ears to the miseries of our fellow-creatures, that we may be able to live at all; and smile, sadly or cynically, at the notion that we could do otherwise.

When the last Fury departs, the Spirits of the Human Mind comfort Prometheus with snatches of the music of that great prophecy of final redemption, of which he is the Alpha and Omega. The breaking into rhyme of Panthea and Ione, as these

"Subtle and fair spirits,
Whose homes are the dim caves of human thought,'

come flying through the air like comforting angels, is like the sudden outbreaking of the sun through a cloud:

"*Panthea.*

Look, sister, where a troop of spirits gather,
Like flocks of clouds in spring's delightful weather
Thronging in the blue air!

Ione.

And see! more come,
Like fountain-vapours when the winds are dumb,
That climb up the ravine in scattered lines.
And hark! is it the music of the pines?
Is it the lake? Is it the waterfall?

Panthea.

'Tis something sadder, sweeter far than all."

A fitting introduction for the beautiful lyrics that follow!

These snatches of prophetic song are still imperfect; one of the spirits narrates an event he has just witnessed:

"A rainbow's arch stood on the sea,
Which rock'd beneath, immovably;
And the triumphant storm did flee,
Like a conqueror, swift and proud,
Between, with many a captive cloud,
A shapeless, dark, and rapid crowd,
Each by lightning riven in half:
I heard the thunder hoarsely laugh:
Mighty fleets were strewn like chaff,
And spread beneath a hell of death
O'er the white waters. I alit
On a great ship lightning-split,
And speeded hither on the sigh
Of one who gave an enemy
His plank, then plunged aside to die."

Here is a story of perfect self-devotion on behalf of an enemy; but the hero has sunk, unrescued by Heaven, into the abysses of the ocean. Only the immovable rainbow stands there, an emblem of hope.

Lastly come two spirits, one of whom has soared over the universe, seeking Love and finding it pursued everywhere by Ruin and Death. The other replies that "Desolation is a delicate thing"—an epicure in the suffering it inflicts, choosing the hopes of the gentlest and best for its prey; fanning them "with silent wing," until they are "soothed to false repose," and call the vampyre which thus deceives them Love, but they "wake, and find the shadow Pain" instead. The general meaning of this dainty but obscure lyric would appear to be that life makes us promises which it never fulfils; we are tantalized with the vision of unrealizable ideals. The full chorus then breaks in with a song of hope:

"Though Ruin now Love's shadow be,
Following him, destroyingly,
On Death's white and wingèd steed,
Which the fleetest cannot flee,
Trampling down both flower and weed,
Man and beast, and foul and fair,
Like a tempest thro' the air;
Thou shalt quell this horseman grim,
Woundless though in heart or limb."

Prometheus (here again like Christ) shall vanquish death itself; and when he asks—

"Spirits! how know ye this shall be?"

they reply in the delicious lines, which seem to be steeped in the balmiest dews of spring:

"In the atmosphere we breathe,
As buds grow red when the snow-storms flee
From spring gathering up beneath,
Whose mild winds shake the elder-brake,

And the wandering herdsmen know
That the whitethorn soon will blow:
Wisdom, Justice, Love, and Peace,
When they struggle to increase,
Are to us as soft winds be
To shepherd boys, the prophecy
Which begins and ends in thee."

The thought which occurs in these lines—that the slightest tendencies towards good visible in the world, are an earnest of its final triumph, just as the first signs of the passing away of winter are an earnest of the coming of spring—is a frequent one in Shelley's writings, but it is nowhere more delicately expressed than here.

These choral voices remind Prometheus of Asia in her lonely vale, and he feels that "all hope is vain but love;" and the act ends with the flight of Panthea to bear to Asia the news of his final suffering.

Act II.

The second act is occupied with the journey of Asia and Panthea to the realm of Demogorgon, by which the deliverance of Prometheus is achieved.

In the first scene we have some of Shelley's most ethereal poetry. Every line seems to palpitate with the dewy sunshine of a sweet spring morning, in which the airiest abstractions of the mind live with a vitality as intense as that of Ariel in the enchanted island. This vitalizing power of the poet's genius, which makes almost every one of his mythical personages live and breathe

with a life sufficiently human to command our sympathies, yet sufficiently "removed from the sphere of our sorrow" to thrill us with the mystery of ideal beauty, is concentrated upon Asia and Panthea, whose words throb with superhuman love and yearning. The opening speech of Asia, who, in her loneliness, laments the delay of Panthea, is perfect for subtle union of music and meaning:

> "From all the blasts of heaven thou hast descended:
> Yes, like a spirit, like a thought, which makes
> Unwonted tears throng to the horny eyes,
> And beatings haunt the desolated heart
> Which should have learnt repose: thou hast descended
> Cradled in tempests; thou dost wake, O spring!
> O child of many winds! As suddenly
> Thou comest as the memory of a dream
> Which now is sad because it hath been sweet;
> Like genius or like joy which riseth up
> As from the earth, clothing with golden clouds
> The desert of our life.
> This is the season, this the day, the hour;
> At sunrise thou shouldst come, sweet sister mine,
> Too long desired, too long delaying, come!"

Panthea is the perpetual messenger of love between Prometheus and his divine consort, as Faith is between the genius of man and its ideal. When she at length enters, Asia hails her as

> "Beloved and most beautiful, who wearest
> The shadow of that soul by which I live;"

and she herself tells how,

> "Before the sacred Titan's fall"

(*i.e.* in the primitive or Saturnian Golden Age, when man

was instinctively at one with nature, and the real one with the ideal),

> "Erewhile I slept
> Under the glaucous caverns of old Ocean,
> Within dim bowers of green and purple moss,
> Our young Ione's soft and milky arms
> Lock'd then, as now, behind my dark, moist hair,
> While my shut eyes and cheek were pressed within
> The folded depth of her life-breathing bosom."

(Faith and Hope slept then, like unopened flowers.)

> "But not, as now, since I am made the wind
> Which fails beneath the music that I bear
> Of thy most wordless converse; since dissolved
> Into the sense with which love talks, my rest
> Was troubled and yet sweet; my waking hours
> Too full of care and pain."

She explains her delay as due to her wings being

> 'Faint
> With the delight of a remembered dream."

In her troubled sleep at the feet of the chained Titan, she has had two dreams. One she does not remember;

> "But in the other his pale wound-worn limbs
> Fell from Prometheus, and the azure night
> Grew radiant with the glory of that form
> Which lives unchanged within."

Asia, then gazing into the eyes of Panthea, discerns first this, and then her forgotten dream. The passionate, quivering intensity of this dialogue between Asia and Panthea intoxicates the reader, like some magical wine distilled from the fragrance of flowers. Beautiful visions arise, change, and pass before his eyes, like opalescent

cloud-wreaths in some ethereal sunrise among the higher Alps; and glimpses of the divine mysteries of creation seem to be caught for a moment between their wings, as the serenest depths of heaven are between delicate flakes of cirrus. Music more strange and sweet and clear than the echoes of Alpine horns from far-off precipices, heard through the crystal air of glaciers, ravishes his ears with wonder and longing, as the divine sisters read each other's thoughts in eager antiphony. Shelley has here made English blank verse the native language of elemental genii:

"*Asia.*

Thou speakest, but thy words
Are as the air: I feel them not. Oh, lift
Thine eyes, that I may read his written soul

Panthea.

I lift them, though they droop beneath the load
Of that they would express: what canst thou see
But thine own fairest shadow imaged there?

Asia.

Thine eyes are like the deep, blue, boundless heaven
Contracted to two circles underneath
Their long, fine lashes; dark, far, measureless,
Orb within orb, and line thro' line inwoven.

Panthea.

Why lookest thou as if a spirit passed?

Asia.

There is a change; beyond their inmost depth
I see a shade, a shape: 'tis He, array'd
In the soft light of his own smiles, which spread
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded morn.
Prometheus, it is thine! depart not yet!
Say not those smiles that we shall meet again

Within the bright pavilion which their beams
Shall build on the waste world? The dream is told.
What shape is that between us? Its rude hair
Roughens the wind that lifts it; its regard
Is wild and quick, yet 'tis a thing of air,
For thro' its grey robe gleams the golden dew
Whose stars the moon has quench'd not.

Dream. Follow! Follow!

Panthea.

It is mine other dream.

Asia.

It disappears.

Panthea.

It passes now into my mind. Methought
As we sate here, the flower-infolding buds
Burst on yon lightning-blasted almond-tree,
When swift from the white Scythian wilderness
A wind swept forth, wrinkling the earth with frost:
I look'd, and all the blossoms were blown down;
But on each leaf was stamp'd, as the blue bells
Of hyacinth tell Apollo's written grief,
O, FOLLOW, FOLLOW!

Asia.

As you speak, your words
Fill, pause by pause, my own forgotten sleep
With shapes. Methought among the lawns together
We wander'd, underneath the young grey dawn,
And multitudes of dense white fleecy clouds
Were wandering in thick flocks along the mountains,
Shepherded by the slow, unwilling wind;
And the white dew on the new-bladed grass,
Just piercing the dark earth, hung silently;
And there was more, which I remember not:
But on the shadows of the morning clouds,
Athwart the purple mountain slope, was written
FOLLOW, O FOLLOW! as they vanish'd by,
And on each herb, from which heaven's dew had fallen,
The like was stamp'd, as with a withering fire.

A wind arose among the pines ; it shook
The clinging music from their boughs, and then
Low, sweet, faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts,
Were heard : O, FOLLOW, FOLLOW, FOLLOW ME !
And then I said, 'Panthea, look on me.'
But in the depth of those belovèd eyes
Still I saw, FOLLOW, FOLLOW !"

Instantly the Echoes take up the cry, and in a series of the wildest, strangest, most delicate lyrics, which seem to waver and flicker hither and thither like Will-o'-the-wisps, lure the Sisters on and on towards some unknown goal. To Asia they declare that—

"In the world unknown
Sleeps a voice unspoken ;
By thy step alone
Can its rest be broken ;
Child of Ocean !"

One fears to touch this exquisite myth, so subtle with fragile evanescent thought, with the rude fingers of critical comment ; yet we have Mrs. Shelley's authority for the importance which Shelley attached to the philosophical meaning which underlies his daintiest verses : "Shelley develops, more particularly in the lyrics of this drama, his abstruse and imaginative theories with regard to the Creation. It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem. They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction, but they are far from vague. It was his design to write prose metaphysical essays on the nature of man, which would have served to explain much of what is obscure in his poetry ; a few scattered frag-

ments of observations and remarks alone remain. He considered these philosophical views of mind and nature to be instinct with the intensest spirit of poetry." In default of such authoritative exposition, we must blunder after the master's footsteps as best we may. The general meaning of this myth, interpreted in relation to human progress, would appear to be that Love and Faith are becoming conscious of their power as practical forces for the regeneration of the world, and are setting out hand in hand to accomplish this; Ione, or Hope, being left to console Prometheus. The forgotten dream of Panthea, with its "rude hair" and "wild and quick regard," represents the Spirit of Progress, while the Echoes are doubtless the voice of Ione, or Primæval Hope, still lingering about the craggy recesses of the world—the transitory aspects of eternal things, the legends of old heroic deeds, the aspiring songs of dead bards.

Shelley is now almost as clearly an evolutionist as any of our most modern philosophers; but he is a transcendental evolutionist of the Hegelian type. His Spirit of Nature is not a blind force, subject to "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change," but an intensely vital Mind, which works through these, and dominates them for a purpose which is ever deepening. The creation is not the mere resultant of blind forces; nor is it a dead plan, foreseen from the beginning, set in motion once for all, and grinding out its pre-ordained course. It is the perpetual effort to realize an ever-developing ideal; the creative Spirit of Nature attaining to more and more complete self-consciousness through self-expression. There

are certain nodal-points in this process of evolution—golden ages, when the real and ideal become one. Evil is, as we have seen, the retarding force, the persistence of the old ideal in its withering, imperfectly realized form, which thus prevents the attainment of the new ideal. It is the discord in the cosmic harmony, which yet results in higher harmony when overcome and resolved—when, after a cycle of suffering through which the world advances to a higher ideal place, Prometheus is again unbound.

The next two scenes, so full of delicious poetry, are full also of subtlest thought. In Scene II., in the second strophe sung by the first semi-chorus of spirits, we have a bit of the Shelleyan philosophy which had its root in Godwin's, expressed in the most ethereal verse :

" There those enchanted eddies play
Of echoes, music-tongued, which draw,
By Demogorgon's mighty law,
With melting rapture or sweet awe,
All spirits on that secret way ;
As inland boats are driven to ocean
Down streams made strong with mountain-thaw.
And first there comes a gentle sound
To those in talk or slumber bound,
And wakes the destined ; soft emotion
Attracts, impels them ; those who saw
Say from the breathing earth behind
There streams a plume-uplifting wind
Which drives them on their path, while they
Believe their own swift wings and feet
The sweet desires within obey :
And so they float upon their way,
Until, still sweet, but loud and strong,
The storm of sound is driven along,

Sucked up and hurrying: as they fleet,
Behind its gathering billows meet,
And to the fatal mountain bear
Like clouds amid the yielding air."

The "echoes, music-tongued," are fragments of the cosmic harmony, which by "Demogorgon's mighty law," or Necessity—the eternal relation between cause and effect—"draw all spirits on that secret way," the path of cosmic evolution, by which Asia and Panthea have just passed. The "plume-uplifting wind" of reason "drives them on their path," while they imagine themselves free agents. The "fatal mountain" may, perhaps, mean the phenomenal world of actual existence. This whole passage seems to have been written with distinct reference to Godwin's *Political Justice*; and the strange expression, "those who saw," may refer to the Necessitarian school, Godwin himself included. "Demogorgon's mighty law," if it be Godwin's "necessity," would assume the form of "reason" in the individual human mind, and "justice" in the human commonwealth.

In Scene III. there is a splendid description of the surging of the sea of morning mist around the rocky pinnacle on which Asia and Panthea stand. Asia bursts into a cry of admiration of the beauty of the earth:

"How glorious art thou, Earth! And if thou be
The shadow of some spirit lovelier still,
Though evil stain its work, and it should be,
Like its creation, weak yet beautiful,
I could fall down and worship that and thee."

Here Asia speaks rather as a mortal maiden might than in her own character; her hypothesis of a creative

Spirit, "weak yet beautiful," to some extent resembling that of Mill, of a Creator of limited power. All this nature-poetry has, as usual throughout the poem, a mythical significance, to which Asia furnishes the key when she says—

> "Hark! the rushing snow!
> The sun-awaken'd avalanche! whose mass,
> Thrice-sifted by the storm, had gather'd there
> Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
> As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
> Is loosen'd, and the nations echo round,
> Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now."

The dawn is the dawn of the new cosmical day which is to deliver Prometheus. The mists themselves are the "oracular vapour" hurled up from the realm of Demogorgon—

> "Which lonely men drink wandering in their youth,
> And call truth, virtue, love, genius, or joy,
> That maddening wine of life, whose dregs they drain
> To deep intoxication; and uplift,
> Like Mænads who cry loud, Evoe! Evoe!
> The voice which is contagion to the world."

Out of these oracular mists come shapes and voices, urging the sisters to plunge down to the underworld of Demogorgon:

> "Even to the steps of the remotest throne,
> Down, down!"

In the day of revolution an appeal to absolute principles becomes necessary.

Finally, in Scene IV., the sisters arrive at the cave of Demogorgon, who appears as an awful, formless shadow, seated on an ebon throne. From him Asia endeavours

to obtain some insight into the grand mysteries of evil; but in vain. The secrets of the abyss of being are unspeakable—"the deep truth is imageless." She gets but enigmatic answers. A merciful and almighty God made the universe; yet he who is the author of evil reigns in it. Asia in this scene also speaks much as an ordinary mortal might; and it is strange to find Demogorgon, who may be supposed to represent the final authority as regards metaphysics, thus declaring the universe to be the creation of God, even though he qualifies this statement as one suited to the understanding of limited intellects.

"*Asia.*
Whom called'st thou God?

Demogorgon.
I spoke but as ye speak,
For Jove is the supreme of living things."

Asia asks the name of the power which mars creation:

"A world pining in pain
Asks but his name: curses shall drag him down."

The only answer vouchsafed by Demogorgon is the thrice-repeated assertion—

"He reigns."

Then follows a curious piece of cosmology, in Asia's long speech telling of the first Golden Age, of Saturn, in which men were happy indeed, but merely in a half-animate way, being refused

"The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,
The skill which wields the elements, the thought
Which pierces this dim universe like light,
Self-empire, and the majesty of love;

> For thirst of which they fainted. Then Prometheus
> Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter,
> And with this law alone, 'Let man be free,'
> Clothed him with the dominion of wide heaven."

This probably means that the human genius at first evolved various religious and political systems (typified in Jupiter), which afterwards hindered the free progress of mankind, and chained up the genius which created them with the fetters of dogma and authority, from which both Godwin and Shelley believed all the miseries of mankind directly to spring. The progress of civilization, which the Titan achieves in spite of his torments, is finely described in the remainder of the speech. Asia is naturally not satisfied with her own account of the matter, and persists in asking the grand question :

> "But who rains down
> Evil, the immedicable plague?"

Jupiter himself she perceives to be merely an efficient, not an absolute cause :

> "Declare
> Who is his master? Is he too a slave?"

But no answer comes to this question ; "the deep truth is imageless." One thing Demogorgon assures her, that all things, saving only eternal Love, are subject to "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change ;" leaving her to judge whether Jupiter be their slave or not. She promptly declares that Prometheus shall be free, and asks when the destined hour shall arrive. Her voice is the trumpet of doom to the tyranny of Jupiter. Instantly the magnificent vision of the Hours appears—

a vision worthy of the pencil of Blake in that most ethereal mood which produced the Book of Thel:

"*Demogorgon.*

Behold!

Asia.

The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
I see cars drawn by rainbow-wingèd steeds
Which trample the dim winds: in each there stands
A wild-eyed charioteer urging their flight.
Some look behind, as fiends pursued them there,
And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars:
Others, with burning eyes, lean forth, and drink
With eager lips the wind of their own speed,
As if the thing they loved fled on before,
And now, even now, they clasped it. Their bright locks
Stream like a comet's flashing hair: they all
Sweep onward.

Demogorgon.

These are the immortal Hours,
Of whom thou didst demand. One waits for thee."

One of these Hours, of terrible aspect, becomes the charioteer of Demogorgon himself, whose ascent typifies some such tremendous event as the French Revolution. Another lovelier spirit, "with the dove-like eyes of Hope," takes Asia and Panthea into her car, and ascends with them to the top of a mountain, where they pause.

The last scene of this act is an enigma which attracts and baffles us with its subtle beauty. It is full of the tender and glowing light of a splendid summer dawn; yet the Spirit of the Hour tells Panthea, who remarks that the sun has not yet risen—

"The sun will rise not until noon. Apollo
Is held in heaven by wonder; and the light

Which fills this vapour, as the aerial hue
Of fountain-gazing roses fills the water,
Flows from thy mighty sister."

At the incoming of this terrible crisis all seems wrapt in the gloom emanating from Demogorgon, who has risen from the abyss; the god of ordinary day is struck with wonder at the extraordinary aspect of things, and forgets to rise. But now the form of Asia becomes transfigured, and she irradiates the gloom with her own splendour:

"*Panthea.*

How thou art changed! I dare not look on thee;
I feel but see thee not. I scarce endure
The radiance of thy beauty. Some good change
Is working in the elements, which suffer
Thy presence thus unveil'd."

The transfigured ideal has become distinctly visible and illuminates the world. Panthea then, in the next lovely and most musical lines, which sway and murmur like enamoured wavelets about the floating shell of Aphrodite, whose attributes she here confers upon her sister, narrates the birth of Asia from the sea:

"The Nereids tell
That on the day when the clear hyaline
Was cloven at thy uprise, and thou didst stand
Within a veinèd shell, which floated on
Over the calm floor of the crystal sea,
Among the Egean isles, and by the shores
Which bear thy name; love, like the atmosphere
Of the sun's fire filling the living world,
Burst from thee, and illumined earth and heaven,
And the deep ocean and the sunless caves,
And all that dwells within them."

Asia is now once more born to conquer the world with the spell of her transcendent beauty :

> " Such art thou now ; nor is it I alone,
> Thy sister, thy companion, thine own chosen one,
> But the whole world which seeks thy sympathy.
> Hear'st thou not sounds i' the air which speak the love
> Of all articulate beings? Feel'st thou not
> The inanimate winds enamour'd of thee? List ! "

A voice is soon afterwards heard singing that loveliest of lyrics, which has been called Shelley's *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature*, and which becomes, if not perfectly clear in its language, at least intelligible, when we recognize that it is the voice of Prometheus that is heard in it. He, like Panthea, has felt the transfiguration of Asia, as, having left her lonely vale, she approaches him ; and he has shared this transfiguration. Is it necessary further to insist on the philosophical meaning of this splendid myth, and to repeat that the vision of the ideal was for Shelley not merely a dream of the human imagination, which corresponds to nothing actual, but the vision of a new divine idea, which becomes incarnate in the real world, when the world becomes thoroughly enamoured of this vision of it? The birth of Asia from the waves, which Panthea has described in words which recall, but outshine, Sandro Botticelli's picture of the birth of Aphrodite, typifies the first vision of the divine idea, which can only become incarnate by the fidelity to it of the human genius, typified in the sufferings of Prometheus. Asia would die without the love of Prometheus. He is, in her own words, the soul

by which she lives, and Panthea, or Faith, sustains her, as well as him, by her angelic mediation between them.

This mysterious love-song is the new love-song of Prometheus on the eve of his golden wedding with Asia. It is Shelley's *Adelaida*—that song of songs in which the human voice acquires the thrilling intensity of the violin, to pour forth the consummate aspirations of a passion which no mortal woman ever inspired. This song is the hymn of Prometheus to Asia; that is to say, the hymn of the Genius of Humanity—or rather, in the deepest sense of the myth, the Genius of the World—to the divine Spirit of Beauty,—that ideal with which it yearns to be made one through all eternity; but here Prometheus speaks out of the mortal hearts of "all articulate beings." That Asia recognizes his voice in the song is evident from her reply:

> "My soul is an enchanted boat,
> Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float
> Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;
> And thine doth like an angel sit
> Beside the helm, conducting it
> Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing."

We now have a clue to the meaning of these strange mystical words, which seem to shudder and die in the white heat of their own ardour, like moths in a flame, and yet to take new life from the flame and become its creatures:

> "Life of life! thy lips enkindle
> With their love the breath between them;
> And thy smiles, before they dwindle,
> Make the cold air fire; then screen them

In those looks, where whoso gazes
Faints, entangled in their mazes."

We must remember Shelley's conception of the ideal as a living and breathing divinity enamoured of the human soul, as Diana was of Endymion. She is at once visible and invisible, felt rather than seen. Her breath comes upon us kindled with the love of her lips, which we cannot kiss. Her transient smiles make the cold air of the actual world fire; but if we dare to look into her eyes we faint, overcome by their depth and complexity:

"Child of Light! thy limbs are burning
Thro' the veil that seems to hide them,
As the radiant hues of morning
Thro' the clouds ere they divide them;
And this atmosphere divinest
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest."

In the second line of this stanza—

"Thro' the veil that seems to hide them,"

I adopt a reading given, I know not upon what authority, in a brilliant article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for April, 1874, signed Arthur Clive. I may, perhaps, be pardoned for doing so, as I am not editing the poem, and the reading of the ordinary texts—

"Thro' the *vest which* seems to hide them,"

seems to me much less euphonious. And now for the meaning of this intense yet delicate breath of music, unearthly as a strain played in the highest register of muted violins. The ideal is at once revealed and concealed by the form in which it becomes incarnate. Asia is in one sense the Spirit of Nature, which is the

incarnation of the evolutional series of divine ideas. The "atmosphere divinest," "that liquid splendour" of the next stanza, is the revealing veil.

> "Fair are others; none beholds thee,
> But thy voice sounds low and tender
> Like the fairest, for it folds thee
> From the sight, that liquid splendour;
> And all feel, yet see thee never,
> As I feel now, lost for ever!"

The obscurity of this stanza is due to the peculiar license of construction Shelley frequently indulges in. The natural sequence of the words would be: "Fair are others; none beholds thee; for that liquid splendour (the veil) folds thee from sight; but thy voice sounds low and tender, like the fairest (voice)." Or perhaps we may construe, "like the (voice of that which is) fairest." The strange words, "lost for ever!" express that passionate self-abandonment which possesses those who yearn after the unattainable ideal.

> "Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest
> Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
> And the souls of whom thou lovest
> Walk upon the winds with lightness,
> Till they fail, as I am failing,
> Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!"

The ideal is the "Lamp of Earth," which, while it attracts the soul like a moth, sheds over the obscure hieroglyphics of the world its revealing light. The souls of the seers, whom it loves, are possessed with that martyr-passion which lifts them above this mortal world, until failure and death are as nothing in their eyes.

The delicious song in which Asia replies, narrates the passage of the world from age to youth, and this closes the act. The rising of Demogorgon is equivalent to what Blake calls "A Day of Judgment passing upon the world." It is a time when withered leaves are blown away, when all shows are torn off, the desires of men's hearts are laid bare, and the fabric of a rotten society falls crashing into anarchy. But anarchy is a mere point of transition, and the world passes

"Thro' Death and Birth to a diviner day."

It is the old, old story, long prophesied of, but not yet come true for our world, of "new heavens and a new earth"—a sabbath of creation, more glorious than that primæval one when the morning stars sang together. When we feel the mysterious rapture, the sublime ravishment of this poetry, we begin to think that there must be some rare influence pervading the spiritual atmosphere of the age in which a young man could dream anew such half-forgotten dreams as these.

CHAPTER VI.

"PROMETHEUS UNBOUND," ACTS III. AND IV.—POEMS PUBLISHED WITH "PROMETHEUS."

"PROMETHEUS UNBOUND."

ACT III.

THE third act introduces us to Jupiter seated on the throne of heaven. He has accomplished his destiny by espousing the sea-nymph Thetis, which, as the Fates have decreed, must be the ruin of his supremacy. This fatal secret Prometheus has all along known; and it was to wrest this from him that Jupiter tortured him. Thetis, like Asia a child of Ocean, is her false counterpart—the bride of Jupiter, as Asia is of Prometheus, but forced by him into unwilling nuptials. She is a type of the false ideal, the sham love and reverence which tyrants exact from their slaves, the superstitious worship of a god who is feared not loved, the adulation which rises like incense round the throne of kings of the Louis Quatorze species, the martial glory of conquerors like

Napoleon. She *is* glory—the tinsel happiness of the vain and selfish, which the vulgar envy. Jupiter boasts that he has just

> "Begotten a strange wonder,
> That fatal child, the terror of the earth."

He hears his chariot thundering up Olympus from Demogorgon's throne, and rejoices, thinking that now Eternal Justice is about to give the sceptre of omnipotence into his hands, to extinguish liberty, and coerce the soul of man into unquestioning obedience. He has begotten the whole monstrous abortion of dogma and tyranny — the Star Chamber of the king, the Holy Inquisition of the priest. It wants but the authority of Demogorgon—the seal of God set upon the bull of Infallibility. And now, even while the boastful words are on his lips, the car of the Hour ascends, Demogorgon seizes him and plunges with him into the abyss, while he howls for mercy, praying that Prometheus may be made his judge. The gloomy sublimity of this scene contrasts well with the ethereal loveliness of that with which the second act ends, and with the calm beauty of the next.

In this scene Apollo magnificently describes to Ocean the fall of Jupiter; the comparison of the defeated tyrant to an eagle caught in a thunderstorm being, as an isolated simile, one of the finest things in our poetry. It is a vivid realization of the visionary incident, in a few words which seem alive with meaning as we read. The eagle, dazzled with blaze of lightning and stunned with crash of thunder, is beaten down by the fierce and un-

relenting hail before our eyes. The vision of it is more real than reality :

"*Ocean.*

He fell, thou say'st, beneath his conqueror's frown?

Apollo.

Ay, when the strife was ended which made dim
The orb I rule, and shook the solid stars,
The terrors of his eye illumined heaven
With sanguine light, through the thick ragged skirts
Of the victorious darkness, as he fell :
Like the last glare of day's red agony,
Which, from a rent among the fiery clouds,
Burns far along the tempest-wrinkled deep.

Ocean.

He sank to the abyss? To the dark void?

Apollo.

An eagle so caught in some bursting cloud
On Caucasus, his thunder-baffled wings
Entangled in the whirlwind, and his eyes,
Which gazed on the undazzling sun, now blinded
By the white lightning, while the ponderous hail
Beats on his struggling form, which sinks at length
Prone, and the aërial ice clings over it."

The remainder of the scene is full of ideal beauty as chaste as that of a Greek statue. It is worthy of a disciple of the great ancient poets and sages ; the verse moves with the majesty of that of Sophocles, and with something of the limpid serenity of the prose of Plato. Yet throughout it all there is a delicate play of iridescent colour, and an exquisite melody of sound, which are peculiarly Shelley's own.

In the third scene Hercules unbinds Prometheus, who, in a long speech full of the calm of long-delayed

happiness, prophesies of the new world he is about to produce by the regeneration of the old one. He himself will dwell with Asia, the "light of life, shadow of beauty unbeheld," and her two sisters, deep in the inmost cavern of the human mind, ever devising

> "Strange combinations out of common things,
> Like human babes in their brief innocence,"

and hearing the echoes which arise from the happy world of men, with its arts. This long speech of Prometheus must be pronounced a little dull, as compared with other portions of the poem; but the poetry glows with new life when, in conclusion, he bids Ione give the Spirit of the Hour the mystic shell which works such wonders on the world:

> "*Prometheus.*
>
> For thee, fair spirit, one toil remains. Ione,
> Give her that curved shell which Proteus old
> Made Asia's nuptial boon, breathing within it
> A voice to be accomplish'd, and which thou
> Didst hide in grass under the hollow rock.
>
> *Ione.*
>
> Thou most desired Hour, more loved and lovely
> Than all thy sisters, this the mystic shell;
> See the pale azure fading into silver,
> Lining it with a soft yet glowing light:
> Looks it not like lull'd music sleeping there?
>
> *Spirit.*
>
> It seems in truth the fairest shell of Ocean:
> Its sound must be at once both sweet and strange.
>
> *Prometheus.*
>
> Go, borne over the cities of mankind
> On whirlwind-footed coursers: once again

Outspeed the sun around the orbèd world;
And, as thy chariot cleaves the kindling air,
Thou breathe into the many-folded shell,
Loosening its mighty music; it shall be
As thunder mingled with clear echoes: then
Return; and thou shalt dwell beside our cave."

This trumpet of Proteus, blown by the Spirit of the Hour, typifies the operation of that plastic force of nature which is the creative or free-will element, added to the sum of existing forces to produce evolution in one out of the infinite number of possible directions—the force which makes blind necessity subject to reason. As the nuptial boon of Asia, it has the power of transforming evil into good. It is the mythical expression of that tendency to produce beautiful results from apparently unfavourable conditions, which really exists in nature, and acts as a sanative and redeeming force upon the human race, bringing genius out of morbidity, and spiritual graces out of calamity.

The Earth thrills to the voice and touch of Prometheus, once more at liberty:

"I hear, I feel;
Thy lips are on me, and thy touch runs down
Even to the adamantine central gloom
Along these marble nerves; 'tis life, 'tis joy,
And thro' my withered, old, and icy frame
The warmth of an immortal youth shoots down
Circling."

Man's spirit being regenerate, Earth herself becomes newborn, and prophesies that poison shall no more emanate from her bosom, but life shall be joy and death a gentle sleep. At the name of death Asia shudders:

"*Asia.*

Oh, mother! wherefore speak the name of death?
Cease they to love, and move, and breathe, and speak,
Who die?

The Earth.

It would avail not to reply:
Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
But to the uncommunicating dead.
Death is the veil which those who live call life:
They sleep, and it is lifted."

Here, as when Asia interrogates Demogorgon as to the nature of evil, the reply is an enigma. The terrible question, What is death? receives from Shelley as vague an answer as the terrible question, What is evil? yet it is probably as good an answer as we can hope for in the present state of our knowledge. Shelley himself appears to have looked upon this epigrammatic phrase of the Earth as the best possible statement of his own philosophic creed in a few words, as he quoted it to Trelawny when that gentleman had fished him up, half-drowned, from the bottom of the Arno. It would seem to be correlated with that expression in *Adonais:*

"Life, like a dome of many-colour'd glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity."

Our present mortal life is the true death. What we call death is the awakening to our spirit's true life in eternity. Why then, we may ask, are we born into this transient world; and, being born, why should we not seek to awake to eternal life as soon as possible? What evolutional purpose is served by our brief sojourn

here? These questions Shelley might perhaps have answered if *The Triumph of Life* had ever been completed. This poem, we may remember, ends with the words:

"'Then what is life?' I cried."

In this scene the young Spirit of the Earth appears —the Earth's torch-bearer, a young Prometheus, like Goethe's Euphorion; and in the next Panthea tells his history:

"It is the delicate spirit
That guides the earth through heaven. From afar
The populous constellations call that light
The loveliest of the planets; and sometimes
It floats along the spray of the salt sea,
Or makes its chariot of a foggy cloud,
Or walks thro' fields or cities while men sleep,
Or o'er the mountain-tops, or down the rivers,
Or thro' the green waste wilderness, as now,
Wondering at all it sees. Before Jove reign'd
It loved our sister Asia, and it came
Each leisure hour to drink the liquid light
Out of her eyes, for which it said it thirsted
As one bit by a dipsas; and with her
It made its childish confidence, and told her
All it had known or seen, for it saw much,
Yet idly reason'd what it saw; and call'd her—
For whence it sprung it knew not, nor do I—
Mother, dear mother."

We may guess that Prometheus and Asia are probably his parents. His former love of Asia is another myth of that primitive golden age when the real was one with the ideal—the Spirit of the Earth with the Spirit of Beauty and Love—in a childish, half-under-

standing fashion. What the Earth means by saying to Asia—

> "This is my torch-bearer;
> Who let his lamp out in old time with gazing
> On eyes from which he kindled it anew
> With love, which is as fire, sweet daughter mine,
> For such is that within thine own"—

is not very clear. It may be a myth of the arrest of progress by the worship of the Spirit of Beauty in its past incarnation—as a child worships a mother, rather than in its eternally renewed essence. Asia only promises to cherish the child until his consort, the moon, is capable of responding to his love. Panthea's account of him would seem to imply that his early passion for Asia was full of childish wonder and curiosity; and the Earth's words may mean that now at the eyes of Asia transfigured he has rekindled his lamp, extinguished during the sufferings of Prometheus, with a deeper passion of more intelligent love. In his speech to Asia he himself tells her he has now grown wiser, and finds "a soul of goodness in things evil," so that even ugly things seem beautiful. At the blowing of the trumpet-shell it is as if an ugly mask had fallen from everything. This, as regards mankind at least, is the mask of hypocritical "custom," which is that mysterious bondage artificially imposed upon the human soul by tyrant priests and kings, with which we became familiar in *Queen Mab*:

> "Those ugly human shapes and visages
> Of which I spoke as having wrought me pain,
> Pass'd floating thro' the air, and fading still
> Into the winds that scatter'd them; and those

From which they pass'd seem'd mild and lovely forms
After some foul disguise had fallen, and all
Were somewhat changed, and after brief surprise
And greetings of delighted wonder, all
Went to their sleep again: and when the dawn
Came, wouldst thou think that toads, and snakes, and efts,
Could e'er be beautiful? Yet so they were,
And that with little change of shape or hue:
All things had put their evil nature off."

The following extract from Godwin's *Political Justice* is an interesting comment upon this and other similar passages in Shelley's poems:—"There is at present in the world a cold reserve that keeps man at a distance from man. . . . At present men meet together with the temper less of friends than enemies. Every man eyes his neighbour as if he expected to receive from him a secret wound.

"How exactly would the whole of this be reversed by the practice of sincerity? We could not be indifferent to men whose custom it was to tell us the truth. Hatred would perish from a failure of its principal ingredient. No man could acquire a distant and unsympathetic temper. Reserve, duplicity, and an artful exhibition of ourselves take from the human form its soul, and leave us the unanimated memento of what man might have been; of what he would have been, were not every impulse of the mind thus stunted and destroyed. If our emotions were not checked, we should be truly friends with each other. Our characters would expand: the luxury of indulging our feelings and the exercise of uttering them, would raise us to the stature of men."

The Spirit of the Hour also gives a long account of

the wondrous effects of her blast from the "curvèd shell." At first, she tells Prometheus, she was

> "Disappointed not to see
> Such mighty change as I had felt within,
> Express'd in outward things: but soon I look'd,
> And behold! thrones were kingless, and men walk'd
> One with the other even as spirits do,
> None fawn'd, none trampled."

She goes on to describe the Shelleyan millenium. Women are

> "Frank, beautiful, and kind
> As the free heaven which rains fresh light and dew
> On the wide earth. . . .
> Gentle radiant forms,
> From custom's evil taint exempt and pure;
> Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,
> Looking emotions once they fear'd to feel."

Sacerdotalism and tyranny are at an end.

> "And those foul shapes, abhorr'd by God and man,
> Which, under many a name and many a form,
> Strange, savage, ghastly, dark, and execrable,
> Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world,
> * * * * * *
> Frown, mouldering fast, o'er their abandon'd shrines.
> * * * * * *
> The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man:
> Equal, unclass'd, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself; just, gentle, wise: but man.
> Passionless? No, yet free from guilt or pain,
> Which were, for his will made or suffered them;
> Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
> From Chance, and Death, and Mutability,
> The clogs of that which else might oversoar
> The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
> Pinnacled dim in the intense inane."

These passages, which give Shelley's mature conception of that "happy earth, reality of heaven" described in *Queen Mab*, are noteworthy as showing that this conception, based upon Godwin's *Political Justice*, remained pretty much the same throughout his life. We catch, indeed, in these long speeches something of the didactic tone of *Queen Mab*, which falls coldly upon ears filled with the pure passion of the lyrical music of the poem. It is but just to Shelley to notice that the motive power which is to produce this stupendous change, which he regards as possible and desirable, is not, as with Godwin, the cold-blooded application of dry reason, but that pure ideal passion of which his own lyrics are full—the divine "contagion" breathed to the world by the voice of poets and martyrs. Both Godwin and Shelley undervalue the enormous power of hereditary evil on the human race; but Shelley's antidote is, at least, infinitely more powerful than Godwin's.

Act iv.

The fourth act, that splendid after-thought, makes us once more free of the highest heaven of lyrical song. The exquisite choral opening, with its antiphonies between the Spirits of the Human Mind and the Hours, needs little explanatory comment. The Spirits of the Mind are now at last free to soar through all the universe with the frank scepticism of children. Compare Walt Whitman's lines:

"O my brave soul! O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!"

The swallow-like flight of these spirits, which seem to pass and repass before the reader's eyes, gleaming, vanishing, and then gleaming again, is subtly suggested by the airy freaks and changes of their songs, as semi-chorus pursues semi-chorus in ethereal glee, snatching the sweet words from each other's mouths in the eager bliss of their new freedom.

"They are gather'd and driven
By the storm of delight, by the panic of glee!"

While listening to their music, Panthea and Ione see a great vision approaching. The river of life is parted into two runnels, the two elements or sexes, which

"Have made their path of melody, like sisters
Who part with sighs that they may meet in smiles,
Turning their dear disunion to an isle
Of lovely grief, a wood of sweet sad thoughts."

The feminine Moon comes sailing down one; the masculine Earth, the young Spirit of the third act, down the other: the Moon full of the chastity of white flame, or love; the Earth rushing along "with whirlwind harmony"—that splendid masculine energy which conquers all things. The orbs within orbs perhaps represent a democratic society of brothers, where each has his own sphere, working in harmony with those of his neighbours. The brook of life is ground by them

"Into an azure mist
Of elemental subtlety, like light"—

the biological science of the future; the "wild odour

of forest flowers" being its art. Beams of thought, darting from the head of the child-spirit within the orb, penetrate into the mysterious secrets of the earth, illuminating things past and present.

The lovely duet between the Earth and the Moon expresses the harmony between the sexes, no longer at variance through defect of intelligent sympathy, but like brother and sister. The feminine Moon is vivified by the intensity of the Earth's passion :

"*The Moon.*

The snow upon my lifeless mountains
Is loosen'd into living fountains,
My solid oceans flow, and sing, and shine :
A spirit from my heart bursts forth,
It clothes with unexpected birth
My cold bare bosom : O it must be thine
On mine, on mine !

Gazing on thee I feel, I know,
Green stalks burst forth, and bright flowers grow,
And living shapes upon my bosom move :
Music is in the sea and air,
Wingèd clouds soar here and there,
Dark with the rain new buds are dreaming of :
'Tis love, all love !"

The splendid masculine egotism of the Earth is controlled and purified by the feminine self-surrender of the Moon ; and ambition and love are thus made one for ever :

"*The Earth.*

O gentle moon, the voice of thy delight
Falls on me like thy clear and tender light
Soothing the seaman, borne the summer night
Thro' isles for ever calm ;

O gentle moon, thy crystal accents pierce
The caverns of my pride's deep universe,
Charming the tiger joy, whose tramplings fierce
Made wounds which need thy balm."

The poem concludes with the rising of Demogorgon, now an incarnation of that "perfect law of liberty" which is but the practical operation of universal love. At his coming the music of the poem takes a graver and deeper tone. There is a Titanic solemnity in his benignant summons to all creation, which seems to soar and dive through the ether of the universe to the ends of space, calm, sombre, and colossal as the tones of the High-Priest of Nature in *Die Zauberflöte*. The Earth dies like a drop of dew at the sound of his voice; the Moon trembles like a leaf; the elemental genii who make their home in the mind of man, of monads, or of minerals, start into expectant consciousness; all things own the justice and power of this unseen God.

His last words express Shelley's conception of the perfect heroism by which man's deliverance from the power of evil is to be accomplished:

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory!"

The effect left on the mind after reading this mag-

nificent poem is like that left by the hearing of a performance of one of Beethoven's symphonies—a sense of delight and wonder and awe, an intoxication of the mind with lofty thoughts, and of the heart with boundless aspirations and wild emotion. We return to the every-day world, from which we have been rapt away on the wings of passion, that "outlaw of Time and Space," with a shock, to feel ourselves once more the prisoners of mortality. To quote the concluding words of the article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* already cited: "Shelley has raised the ideal of human excellence so far as almost to make us hate the word 'progress' and grow weary of 'civilization,' whose results up to the present have been so meagre and disheartening. We are scarce fit to breathe in his atmosphere, but it is good for us to know that it exists."

Poems published with "Prometheus Unbound."

Along with *Prometheus Unbound* were published nine poems, most of them written in 1819 and 1820, and chosen by Shelley as fit companions for his great work. Of these, four are odes—*To Heaven*, *To the West Wind*, the *Ode, written October*, 1819, *before the Spaniards had recovered their liberty*, and the great *Ode to Liberty*, also inspired by Spain. The remaining five poems of this wonderful volume are—*The Sensitive-Plant;* the fragment called *A Vision of the Sea;* the little poem, comparing poets to chameleons, called *An Exhortation;* and the two

most popular of Shelley's lyrics, *The Cloud*, and *To a Skylark*.

The *Prometheus* takes the breath away with the subtlety of its philosophic meaning and the thrilling intensity and mysterious perfection of its music. To praise particular passages seems almost an impertinence, and all words of praise sound prosaic and inadequate. The majesty of Mont Blanc or the Jungfrau is not to be gauged with spirit-levels and theodolites—it makes itself known to the heart in poetry, uttered or silent; and so, with a great poem, the critic must become a poet or turn away abashed.

It is a relief, therefore, to pass to these minor poems, about which, great as some of them are, something may be said in plain prose with less of this feeling of impertinence. We may take them in the order in which they usually stand. *The Sensitive-Plant* is one of Shelley's most romantic pieces of nature-poetry—as romantic in its way as a story of Andersen's. But Shelley has none of the quaint humour and pathos of Andersen. His imagination is less childlike. He does not indulge in the whimsical make-believe which creates a human hero out of a tin soldier. He feels, in passionate earnest, the love and sorrow of that poet, the sensitive-plant. He is not consciously allegorizing, any more than Andersen, when he puts a human soul not only in the plants, but in the garden itself, but he lends more of his own personality to the half-animate creatures he animates. In making the sensitive-plant "desire what it has not, the beautiful," he endows it with the sorrow of the Poet

in *Alastor*. In describing the final fate of the garden, he broods over the mystery of death, which meets him face to face in *Prometheus*. The lady whose tender care maintained the beauty of the garden of which she was the soul, whose pity fell even upon the noxious insects that hurt her beloved flowers—

> "And all killing insects and gnawing worms,
> And things of obscene and unlovely forms,
> She bore in a basket of Indian woof,
> Into the rough woods far aloof,
>
> "In a basket of grasses and wild-flowers full,
> The freshest her gentle hands could pull
> For the poor banish'd insects, whose intent,
> Although they did ill, was innocent;"—

the lady who so gently dealt with the political criminals of her small commonwealth, dies, and the garden slowly falls into decay. This gradual and loathsome process of rotting was never more powerfully described than here; but the poem ends with a sigh after immortality:

> "In this life
> Of error, ignorance, and strife,
> Where nothing is, but all things seem,
> And we the shadows of the dream,
>
> "It is a modest creed, and yet
> Pleasant, if one considers it,
> To own that death itself must be,
> Like all the rest, a mockery."

Why the fragment entitled *A Vision of the Sea*, which, in spite of its graphic power, is rather chaotic, should have been published in such company, and in this unfinished state, must remain as great a mystery as the

fate of the mother and child who figure therein. There is something vigorous and new in these leaping anapæsts; and the whole thing may really have been a vision, which ceased as suddenly as the verses in which it is chronicled.

In the *Ode to Heaven* three spirits are the lyrical speakers, and in verse that flows swiftly in three crystal streams express three distinct conceptions respecting the vast dome of the sky. The first addresses it as

> "The abode
> Of that power which is the glass
> Wherein man his nature sees."

Man imagines deities of a nature like his own, and thus endows this power with human attributes; but this power remains the same, mocking his weak conceptions with its inscrutable changelessness:

> "Generations as they pass
> Worship thee with bended knees.
> Their unremaining gods and they
> Like a river roll away:
> Thou remainest such alway."

The second spirit regards it as but the vestibule of the mind's immortal life:

> "Thou art but the mind's first chamber,
> Round which its young fancies clamber,
> Like weak insects in a cave,
> Lighted up with stalactites;
> But the portal of the grave,
> Where a world of new delights
> Will make thy best glories seem
> But a dim and noonday gleam
> From the shadow of a dream"

The third spirit checks the presumption of finite creatures in attempting to sound the depths of infinity. The spheres are but drops of blood in nature's thinnest veins; the spirits are but parts of the universal spirit; heaven itself is but a drop of dew:

> "What is heaven? a globe of dew,
> Filling in the morning new
> Some eyed flower whose young leaves waken
> On an unimagined world."

We may pass over the pretty trifle about poets and chameleons, and come to the *Ode to the West Wind*, the most perfect in form, if not the most important in substance, of Shelley's odes. Written in the beautiful Cascine at Florence, when this wind was blowing, the whole poem seems like a dirge-like blast of song, on which the poet's soul is borne onward like a leaf, "to quicken a new birth" in our spiritual world. The idea of the poem—that nature moves in cycles, each of which prepares for those which follow; that the wind which strips the leaves from the trees, sows the seeds of future forests; that winter is the harbinger of spring—is to be found elsewhere in Shelley's poetry. This is but a cardinal instance of the manner in which he dwells upon the analogies between the world of sense and the world of spirit, until the veil which parts them seems to be half lifted. The wind itself is for him a living spirit, to whom he cries for inspiration; and the spirit of the wind seems to have heard him and entered into him. The desires of the last fervid stanza read now like a prophecy fulfilled:

"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

"Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth!
And by the incantation of this verse,

"Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

"The trumpet of a prophecy! O wind,
If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

The *Ode to the Assertors of Liberty*, written in October, 1819, is greatly inferior in every way, being a spasmodic impromptu; but it is valuable as a protest against revenge and bloodshed:

"Conquerors have conquer'd their foes alone,
Whose revenge, pride, and power, they have overthrown:
Ride ye, more victorious, over your own.
"Bind, bind every brow
With crownals of violet, ivy, and pine:
Hide the blood-stains now
With hues which sweet nature has made divine—
Green strength, azure hope, and eternity.
But let not the pansy among them be;
Ye were injured, and that means memory."

Shelley's dislike of bloodshed does not seem to have extended to royal blood, as the very next year, 1820, he writes thus from Naples: "At Naples the constitu-

tional party have declared to the Austrian Minister, that if the Emperor should make war upon them, their first action would be to put to death all the members of the Royal Family—a most necessary and just measure, where the forces of the combatants, as well as the merits of their respective causes, are so unequal. That kings should be everywhere the hostages for liberty was admirable."

The Cloud is just the kind of poem to be popular in a *Golden Treasury*, where readers might get it by heart and fancy they knew Shelley. All Shelley's genius cannot make musical this sing-song metre, with its monotonous recurrence of clashing rhymes. A violinist might as well attempt a solo on the banjo. As a piece of natural science prettily poetized, it is a delicate morsel enough.

To a Skylark is a song of an immeasurably higher strain, full of the rapture and aspiration of that "unbodied joy" whose flight it sings. The very metre suggests the dizzy ecstasy of this flight, with its fluttering pauses, and sidelong swervings, and upward gyrations. It is "a rain of melody," showered on us from the sky of poesy, to which the world *does* listen now, as the poet was listening then.

The *Ode to Liberty* is among the grandest of Shelley's longer lyrics. The verse soars on in its majestic eagle-flight, scarcely stooping or faltering once in the whole course of the nineteen great stanzas of which the poem consists. In this ode, history, concentrated to its elements, becomes transfigured into a triumph of

liberty, which the poet hymns as though it were an Olympian victor whose crowning he sat to witness. The opening lines, by connecting the general idea of liberty with the actual contemporary struggles of a great nation, enable the mind to rise from the solid earth of reality for its ideal flight:

> "A glorious people vibrated again.
> The lightning of the nations, Liberty,
> From heart to heart, from tower to tower, o'er Spain,
> Scattering contagious fire into the sky,
> Gleamed."

Hence, accordingly, the poet's soul starts, like an eagle, from its craggy post of vantage:

> "My soul spurn'd the chains of its dismay,
> And in the rapid plumes of song
> Clothed itself, sublime and strong,—
> As a young eagle soars the morning clouds among,
> Hovering inverse o'er its accustom'd prey:
> Till from its station in the heaven of Fame
> The spirit's whirlwind rapt it; and the ray
> Of the remotest sphere of living flame
> Which paves the void was from behind it flung,
> As foam from a ship's swiftness, when there came
> A voice out of the deep; I will record the same."

The next two stanzas, though maintaining the lofty tone of the first in the music of their verse, are scarcely worthy of the rest of the poem when their sense is taken into consideration. It seems rather absurd to speak of the primæval chaos, and the wars of beast against beast, as being due to want of liberty; even when we understand the connection which existed in Shelley's mind

between the idea of liberty and that of reason. There can be no liberty without freedom of the individual, and the individual can have no free will until reason has made him free. The same idea seems to have been in Milton's mind when he says, "Reason also is choice." We find further on in this ode that liberty and anarchy are antagonistic—liberty would not be liberty if disjoined from

> "Blind Love, and equal Justice, and the Fame
> Of what has been, the Hope of what will be?"

The really great portion of the poem begins with that splendid vision of Athens to which the fourth stanza leads up. In this fourth stanza occurs a thought already expressed by Michael Angelo in one of his sonnets, in which he speaks of a block of marble as containing a beautiful statue, which the sculptor reveals by removing the superfluous and concealing stone. Shelley's expression of the thought is broader, though less precise, and is connected with another, more familiar to his mind—that of the future sleeping in the present, like a flower in the bud, the more perfect organism in the less perfect:

> "And, like unfolded flowers beneath the sea,
> Like the man's thought dark in the infant's brain,
> Like aught that is which wraps what is to be,
> Art's deathless dreams lay veil'd by many a vein
> Of Parian stone."

There may have been another thought in his mind as he wrote this—that the art of Greece arising out of her rocks was but a type of her whole civilization arising out

of her soil and climate. This would give additional force to the magnificent simile which follows, in which Athens is compared to

> "A city such as vision
> Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
> Of battlemented cloud, as in derision
> Of kingliest masonry."

There is in the versification of this ode something of the grandiose majesty of the stanzas of *Childe Harold*, and the historical allusions also remind the reader of the noble use of history for the purposes of poetry made by Byron in that poem. If Byron caught something of Shelley's ethereality in his last two cantos, we may perhaps here credit Byron with having partly inspired Shelley, as the glorious lines taken as a motto for the poem would seem to indicate. At any rate, there is in this poem more of that great quality of Byron's Spenserian stanza—sustained majesty, than is usually to be found in Shelley's poetry. Many phrases also grip the attention with the sure stroke of an eagle's talons, almost as if they were Byron's own, as when in the twelfth stanza, in addressing Liberty, he speaks of Napoleon as

> "The anarch of thine own bewildered powers."

This whole stanza, descriptive of his rise and fall, is grand:

> "Thou heaven of earth! what spells could pall thee then
> In ominous eclipse? A thousand years,
> Bred from the slime of deep Oppression's den,
> Dyed all thy liquid light with blood and tears,

Till thy sweet stars could weep the stain away.
How, like Bacchanals of blood,
Round France, the ghastly vintage, stood
Destruction's sceptred slaves, and Folly's mitred brood!
When one, like them, but mightier far than they,
The anarch of thine own bewildered powers,
Rose: armies mingled in obscure array
Like clouds with clouds, darkening the sacred bowers
Of serene heaven. He, by the past pursued,
Rests with those dead but unforgotten hours
Whose ghosts scare victor kings in their ancestral towers."

The appeal to England and Spain, though lapsing into obscurity at the end, is fine, with its superb simile of the volcanoes; and in the next stanza there is epigrammatic force in the designation of Germany as the

"Wild Bacchanal of truth's mysterious wine,
King-deluded Germany;"

and a real insight into the weakness of Italy shown in thus adjuring her:

"O Italy,
Gather thy blood into thy heart; repress
The beasts who make their dens thy sacred palaces!"

Both these passages have their application at the present day; Germany is still "king-deluded," and Italy still needs to gather the patriotic blood about her heart, and become a single vigorous nationality.

In the seventeenth stanza Shelley recurs to his favourite doctrine of the omnipotence of the human will:

"He who taught man to vanquish whatsoever
Can be between the cradle and the grave
Crown'd him the King of Life. O vain endeavour,
If on his own high will, a willing slave,
He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor!"

If this will be depraved; if life can breed new wants, and wealth can rend from those who toil and groan a thousandfold for one of the gifts of liberty and nature; then what boots it that man's wealth be inexhaustible, and man's power, which lies dormant in his thought, be unlimited?

"What if earth can clothe and feed
Amplest millions at their need,
And power in thought be as the tree within the seed?"

It was one of Shelley's dreams, and not, perhaps, an altogether baseless one, that the chemistry of the future might directly elaborate human food out of its crude elements, abundantly existing in the mineral crust of the globe and its atmosphere, without their having to pass through a natural process of transformation in the tissues of plants and animals. In the next lines he apparently uses the word "art" in the sense of this applied science of the future:

"Or what if Art, an ardent intercessor,
Driving on fiery wings to Nature's throne,
Checks the great mother stooping to caress her,
And cries, 'Give me, thy child, dominion
Over all height and depth."

In the next stanza, seeing how vain is even the vast power which is the product of science without something more spiritual, he cries—

"Come Thou! But lead out of the inmost cave
Of man's deep spirit—as the morning star
Beckons the sun from the Eoan wave—
Wisdom. I bear the pennons of her car,
Self-moving, like clouds charioted by flame!"

This Wisdom, the divine philosophy or religion of the future, is to be the final result of that liberty, the birth of which laid the foundations of the world in chaos; and here, accordingly, the great voice heard by the poet ceases. The last stanza concludes the ode as grandly as it begins:

"The solemn harmony

"Paused, and the spirit of that mighty singing
To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn.
Then, as a wild swan, when sublimely winging
Its path athwart the thunder-smoke of dawn,
Sinks headlong through the aërial golden light
On the heavy-sounding plain,
When the bolt has pierced its brain;
As summer clouds dissolve unburden'd of their rain;
As a far taper fades with fading night;
As a brief insect dies with dying day;
My song, its pinions disarray'd of night,
Droop'd. O'er it closed the echoes far away
Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,—
As waves which lately paved his watery way
Hiss round a drowning head in their tempestuous play."

Though not published with these poems, the *Ode to Naples*, written in 1819, may be fitly studied in connection with them. As compared to the *Ode to Liberty*, it is of secondary importance, though containing many exquisite passages full of Shelley's ethereal music. The introduction, beautiful as it is, has not the simple appropriateness of that to the *Ode to Liberty*. It is too long; and the second epode seems weak and fantastic after the perfect music of the first, which so splendidly describes the unburied city of the past, in the ruined streets of which the poet stands. The next strophe, in which

Naples is addressed, is fine; but the three succeeding sections read like a prize poem—the work of a poet, no doubt, but the work of a poet who is working intellectually rather than with fresh emotional inspiration. In the two concluding epodes there is a murmurous roll of lofty sound, which is imposing; but all through the poem the reader's imagination is rather dazzled with beautiful imagery than possessed with noble passion. In this ode, as in the *Ode to Liberty*, Shelley's unrivalled power of creating images, as beautiful as they are original, from natural phenomena—the rarest as well as the most familiar—is abundantly evidenced.

CHAPTER VII.

SATIRES—POLITICAL POEMS—TRANSLATIONS.

THE year 1819 was, as we have seen, that of Shelley's highest achievement. No poet since Shakespeare had in one year brought forth two such masterpieces as *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci;* to say nothing of such minor poems as the *Ode to the West Wind* and the two smaller odes published with *Prometheus.* This and the two succeeding years, indeed, represent a period in which his mind passed through the crisis of its fever of intellectual adolescence, and tried its strength in the most varied directions with various success—lyrics, satires, political poems, prose essays, and translations from Greek, Spanish, Italian, and German were produced with marvellous rapidity, as if to relieve the tension of the creative faculty, and with almost as little conscious effort as the many letters to his friends written about this time.

"PETER BELL THE THIRD."

As early as 1817, he had been cradled into satirical poetry by the wrong of the loss of his children—if

indeed we may designate a satire that vigorous anathema upon Lord Eldon, *To the Lord Chancellor*. He now attacked Wordsworth, whom he felt to be in some sort a "Lost Leader," in a much more distinctly satirical poem, *Peter Bell the Third*, written at the Villa Vaisovano, which had witnessed the birth of *The Cenci*. Mrs. Shelley's note sets this strange idealistic skit in its true light: "This poem is, like all others written by Shelley, ideal. He conceived the idealism of a poet—a man of lofty and creative genius—quitting the glorious calling of discovering and announcing the beautiful and good, to support and propagate ignorant prejudices and pernicious errors; imparting to the unenlightened, not that ardour for truth and spirit of toleration which Shelley looked on as the sources of the moral improvement and happiness of mankind; but false and injurious opinions—that evil was good, and that ignorance and force were the best allies of purity and virtue. His idea was that a man gifted, even as transcendently as the author of *Peter Bell*, with the highest qualities of genius, must, if he fostered such errors, be infected with dullness. This poem was written as a warning—not as a narration of the reality." When she says that "nothing personal to the author of *Peter Bell* is intended in this poem," the assertion seems to border on paradox. However ideal the poem may be, it scourges Wordsworth's personality most distinctly and severely—much more so than Browning's *Lost Leader*, also an ideal poem suggested by Wordsworth.

On *Peter Bell the Third* Shelley's reputation for possessing humour chiefly depends; and though the humour of the poem is of such peculiar quality as to be but faintly perceptible to many readers, it would be churlish to deny its existence. Such humour as there is, is of a weird Will-o'-the-wispish kind, which faintly reminds one of the Fool in *King Lear*, whom Shelley has distinctly imitated in Archy in his *Charles the First*. It is a weak shimmering of forced fun over a marish of tears; and it is blent all through with corruscations of epigrammatic wit. This is evident enough in the third section of the poem, entitled *Hell*. There are "tears such as angels weep" beneath the effort at smartness of such stanzas as these:—

"Hell is a city much like London—
A populous and smoky city;
There are all sorts of people undone,
And there is little or no fun done;
Small justice shown, and still less pity.

"There is a Castles, and a Canning,
A Cobbett, and a Castlereagh;
All sorts of caitiff corpses planning
All sorts of cozening, for trepanning
Corpses less corrupt than they.

* * * * *

"There are mincing women, mewing
(Like cats, who *amant miserè*)
Of their own virtue, and pursuing
Their gentler sisters to that ruin
Without which—what were chastity?"

The quaint melancholy of that first sentence—

"Hell is a city much like London—
A populous and smoky city;"

lingers on the ear, leaving the mind vibrating between a smile and a sigh.

The description of the Prince Regent and his intellectual court has satirical point:

"The Devil was no uncommon creature;
A leaden-witted thief—just huddled
Out of the dross and scum of Nature;
A toad-like lump of limb and feature,
With mind, and heart, and fancy muddled.

"He was that heavy, dull, cold thing,
The spirit of Evil well may be:
A drone too base to have a sting;
Who gluts, and grimes his lazy wing,
And calls lust 'luxury.'

* * * * *

"It was his fancy to invite
Men of science, wit, and learning,
Who came to lend each other light;
He proudly thought that his gold's might
Had set those spirits burning.

"And men of learning, science, wit,
Consider'd him as you and I
Think of some rotten tree, and sit
Lounging and dining under it,
Exposed to the wide sky."

In the account of the gradual withering of Peter's soul, there is the same melancholy earnestness underlying the attempt at bantering lightness; and in such a stanza as this the earnestness appears pure and simple:

"And so his soul would not be gay,
But moan'd within him; like a fawn
Moaning within a cave, it lay
Wounded and wasting, day by day,
Till all its life of life was gone."

The last stanzas of the concluding section of the poem are among the best, not only for their whimsical humour, but for their vividness. The plague of dullness was never so sung before:

"But a disease soon struck into
The very life and soul of Peter.
He walk'd about—slept—had the hue
Of health upon his cheeks—and few
Dug better—none a heartier eater:—

"And yet a strange and horrid curse
Clung upon Peter, night and day.
Month after month the thing grew worse,
And deadlier than in this my verse
I can find strength to say.

* * * * *

"And worse and worse the drowsy curse
Yawn'd in him till it grew a pest;
A wide contagious atmosphere
Creeping like cold through all things near;
A power to infect and to infest."

And so, stanza after stanza, the atmosphere of dullness gathers round the doomed soul, until the poem ends in a solemn chord which recalls the conclusion of Pope's *Dunciad:*

"No bailiff dared within that space,
For fear of the dull charm, to enter;
A man would bear upon his face,
For fifteen months in any case,
The yawn of such a venture.

Seven miles above—below—around—
This pest of dullness holds its sway;
A ghastly life without a sound.
To Peter's soul the spell is bound—
How should it ever pass away?"

Political Poems.

It was probably previous to the production of *Peter Bell*, and while at the Villa Valsovano, that Shelley wrote the group of political poems of which the *Masque of Anarchy* is the most important. This splendid poem, we know from Mrs. Shelley's note, was written there, while *The Cenci* was in progress; the news of the Manchester massacre having roused the tempest of indignation which found vent therein—that rushing mighty wind of patriotic passion which takes one's breath away with its impetuous onset. This *Masque of Anarchy* is as great a masterpiece of its kind—as dæmonic an utterance, as the *Ode to the West Wind* itself. There is an Apocalyptic grandeur in the vision with which it commences, which has the grim earnestness, with much more than the poetical power, of Langland's, which is the only English work which at all resembles it. Anarchy, surrounded by his standing army of "hired murderers," and preceded by Murder, Fraud, and Hypocrisy incarnate in Castlereagh, Eldon, and Sidmouth, looms appallingly before the reader's imagination as the stanzas wing their way through his mind. The sudden flight of Hope as the procession approaches is among the most delicate of Shelley's imaginations:

> "When one fled past, a maniac maid,
> And her name was Hope, she said;
> But she look'd more like Despair;
> And she cried out in the air:
>
> "'My father Time is weak and grey
> With waiting for a better day;

See how idiot-like he stands,
Fumbling with his palsied hands!

" ' He has had child after child,
And the dust of death is piled
Over every one but me—
Misery! oh, misery! '

" Then she lay down in the street
Right before the horses' feet,
Expecting with a patient eye
Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy :—

" When between her and her foes
A mist, a light, an image rose,
Small at first, and weak and frail
Like the vapour of a vale :

" Till, as clouds grow on the blast
Like tower-crown'd giants striding fast,
And glare with lightnings as they fly,
And speak in thunder to the sky,

" It grew—a shape array'd in mail
Brighter than the viper's scale,
And upborne on wings whose grain
Was as the light of sunny rain.

" On its helm seen far away
A planet like the morning's lay ;
And those plumes its light rain'd through,
Like a shower of crimson dew."

The "words of joy and fear," which proceed from this apparition of Liberty which rescues Hope from her foes, constitute a spirited address from Shelley to the English nation, couched in the simplest and most direct language, but full of the eloquence of true passion. The most remarkable passage is that in which he preaches the doctrine of passive resistance fervently and unflinchingly :

"Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with ne'er said words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free!

"Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpen'd swords,
And wide as targes let them be,
With their shade to cover ye.

"Let the tyrants form around
With a quick and startling sound,
Like the loosening of a sea,
Troops of arm'd emblazonry.
* * * *

"Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest closed and mute,
With folded arms, and looks which are
Weapons of an unvanquish'd war.
* * * *

"And if then the tyrants dare,
Let them ride among you there,
Slash and stab and maim and hew:
What they like, that let them do.

"With folded arms and steady eyes
And little fear and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay,
Till their rage has died away.

"Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

"Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand—
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street:

"And the bold true warriors
Who have hugg'd danger in the wars

Will turn to those who would be free,
Ashamed of such base company :

"And that slaughter to the nation
Shall steam up like inspiration,
Eloquent, oracular,
A volcano heard afar :

"And these words shall then become
Like Oppression's thunder'd doom,
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again—again—again !

"Rise, like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number !
Shake your chains to earth, like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you !
Ye are many—they are few."

These are noble lines, however Utopian the advice contained in them may seem ; and it must be admitted that a band of patriots with sufficient resolution to face martyrdom in the manner therein described would produce an infinitely greater effect upon national public opinion than twice their number of armed insurgents. The sword of their mouth would be more powerful than a park of artillery.

The song *To the Men of England*, and the lines to the air of *God save the Queen*, are still homelier attempts to write songs for the people which would stir up the patriotic spirit of liberty. The *Lines written during the Castlereagh Administration*, the sonnet *England in* 1819, and the lines on Castlereagh and Sidmouth are most pungent sarcasms upon the Government—the concluding lines of this last being especially graphic in their pitiless scorn :

"As a shark and dogfish wait
Under an Atlantic isle
For the negro-ship whose freight
Is the theme of their debate,
Wrinkling their red gills the while—

"Are ye, two vultures sick for battle,
Two scorpions under one wet stone,
Two bloodless wolves whose dry throats rattle
Two crows perched on the murrain'd cattle,
Two vipers tangled into one."

The sonnet ends with a hope of better things:

"An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king,—
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn, mud from a muddy spring,—
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
But leechlike to their fainting country cling,
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow,—
A people starved and stabb'd in the untill'd field,—
An army which liberticide and prey
Make as a two-edged sword to all who wield,—
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay,—
Religion Christless, Godless, a book seal'd,—
A Senate—time's worst statute unrepeal'd,—
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst to illumine our tempestuous day."

"SWELLFOOT THE TYRANT."

Swellfoot the Tyrant, Shelley's most ponderous political satire, may perhaps rank next to his early novels, though certainly *longo intervallo*, in the list of his failures. Such humour as it has is of a ghastly kind, and the wit often seems starved and pointless. Yet there is a certain grandeur of idea in this burlesque of Sophocles, and the whole of it bears the stamp of Shelley,

though of Shelley at his weakest. To understand the point of many of the allusions, it would be necessary to have such an acquaintance with the public scandal and newspaper politics of the day as only a German critic could be expected to acquire. It is not difficult to discover Castlereagh under Purganax, Wellington under Laoctonos, and Eldon under Dakry; but when we inquire further who the Archpriest Mammon, and who the three Jews, Moses, Solomon, and Zephaniah, may be, we find it hard to arrive at any satisfactory answer. Lord Liverpool (First Lord of the Treasury), Vansittart (Chancellor of the Exchequer), and Sidmouth (Home Secretary), all suggest themselves as probable candidates for the honour of figuring as Mammon; but it is difficult to connect any one of them definitely with that personage. In any case, Mammon is probably as much a type of English politics as a particular person. The three subordinate oppressors of the pigs are probably, as Mr. Rossetti suggests, as a piece of Shelleyan humour given Jewish names, merely because the Jews consider swine unclean animals. Solomon, the Court Porkman, may possibly represent finance, in the person of Rothschild, then rising into notoriety. Zephaniah, the Pig Butcher, is, no doubt, typical of physical force employed to repress popular outbreaks, and particularly the person who called out the yeomanry at Manchester. Moses can scarcely be Malthus himself, but may be some politician of Malthusian proclivities. The Leech Mr. Rossetti considers a type of debt; and its "lubricous round rings" may, on that supposition, be taken to represent

the millions of the National Debt. The "vomit of the Leech," which is one of the ingredients of the poison of the Green Bag, is, of course, bribery money; and this would look as if the Leech were rather a type of taxation than merely of debt. The Gadfly is evidently slander, though what the "eleven feet with which he crawls" can be is not very clear. The Rat is Government espionage; he represents the whole clandestine system of which detectives, informers, and perjurers, such as Oliver, are the instruments. The Cat, whom Purganax threatens to call out of the kitchen to put him to flight, is the British policeman. The Green Spider, of which the Green Bag is the poison-bag, is the law.

It is evident all through the play that Shelley finds it difficult to keep up the tone of burlesque. He sings in a weak falsetto, which breaks ever and anon into his deeper voice—the ridiculous tending to sink into the sublime; and in the grim grotesque of the song of Liberty at the end the burlesque tone has completely vanished.

Translations.

The number and value of Shelley's translations is wonderful when we consider that they were hastily thrown off as a relaxation from more serious work. They consist of fragments taken from the Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and German, those from Calderon and Goethe being perhaps the most valuable. Of the fidelity of the Greek translations to their originals, I cannot

pretend to speak. It may be that none of them are free from slight blemishes and petty inaccuracies, such as Mr. Swinburne has noted in that from the *Cyclops* of Euripides. There can be but one opinion as to their ease and grace; and Mr. Swinburne has himself done full justice to the manner in which Shelley has rendered the spirit of the originals. "While revising the version of the *Cyclops*," he says, "I have felt again, and more keenly, the old delight of wonder at its matchless grace of unapproachable beauty, its strength, ease, delicate simplicity, and sufficiency; the birthmark and native quality of all Shelley's translations." The *Hymn to Mercury* and *Cyclops*, in his rendering of them, may take their place in our literature as fine English poems. Both are full of a twinkling humour and a genial terrestrial sunshine not characteristic of his own original work.

The fragment from Dante's *Purgatorio*, though not so perfect as revision would doubtless have made it, is on the whole singularly felicitous, especially when the difficulty of the metre is taken into account. The most delicately perfect bit is the description of the birds. Dante is describing his exploration of a forest in the early morning. He feels on his forehead the gentle dawn-wind:

> "Per cui le fronde, tremolando pronte
> Tutti quante piegavano alla parte,
> U'la prim' ombra gitta il santo monte:
> Non però dal lor esser dritto sparte
> Tanto, che gli augelletti per le cime
> Lasciasser d'operare ogni lor arte,

Ma con piena letizia l'aure prime,
Cantando, riceveano intra le foglie,
Che tenevan bordone alle sue rime,
Tal, qual di ramo in ramo si raccoglie
Per la pineta in sul lito di Chiassi,
Quand' Eölo Scirocco fuor discioglie."

Shelley translates thus:

"In which the * * * leaves tremblingly were
All bent towards that part where earliest
The sacred hill obscures the morning air.

"Yet were they not so shaken from their rest
But that the birds, perched on the utmost spray,
Incessantly renewing their blithe quest,

"With perfect joy received the early day,
Singing within the glancing leaves, whose sound
Kept a low burden to their roundelay,

"Such as from bough to bough gathers around
The pine forest on bleak Chiassi's shore,
When Æolus Sirocco has unbound."

Except that

"Incessantly renewing their blithe quest"

seems to be a provisional line left in, *faute de mieux*, and that "gathers *around* the pine forest" scarcely gives the force of "*per la pineta*," the rendering may be considered as perfect as is possible.

The scenes from Calderon's *Magico Prodigioso* are among Shelley's masterpieces of translation, though in many instances his imagination becomes fired by some thought or image in his text, and he paraphrases and amplifies rather than translates. There is in Calderon a subtlety of imaginative conception with which Shelley

evidently had much sympathy; but while the great Spaniard, when at his best, is reticent of his words and frequently obscure from the concise expression of his thought, his translator delights in expansion, and fills his imagery with his own light and air. It is as though Turner should copy a bit of Masaccio's frescoed landscape in his own delicate water-colour, or as though Beethoven should rehandle Palestrina in the modern spirit. It is just the obscure passages of Calderon that Shelley lights up most clearly with his sympathetic spirit, catching at a subtle thought with bright intuition, making it his own, and sometimes giving it more complete and imaginative expression than it had in the original. In other cases, where Calderon marches with somewhat stiff gait of small logically connected steps to the full expression of his thought, Shelley compresses and renders the thought in more imaginative language.

As compared with other translators, Shelley's transcendant merit is that he is, before all other things, a *poet*, who gives the English reader fine English poetry. But this is not all; through the medium of the strong Shelleyan colour which this very poetry gives to all his translations, and which partially obscures what is most Dantesque in Dante, most Calderonic in Calderon, most Goethian in Goethe, he usually gives us the spirit of his author, so far as this can be given in a metre different from the original, as few other translators have ever done. In addition to this, he is frequently almost as literally accurate in giving the meaning of his text

as the best prose translator, with a felicity in his choice of the absolutely right word which no prose translator ever had. He does indeed occasionally *mis*-translate passages, either from imperfect knowledge of the language with which he has to deal, or, as is more frequently the case, from some inexplicable whim or carelessness. Where a passage interests him so much as to fire his imagination, or where it does not interest him enough to arrest his attention, he may either rise above or fall below his author, or simply misinterpret his meaning. He was not a professional translator, and his translations have some of the faults as well as the merits of spontaneous improvisations. Their gravest defect is that they so seldom reproduce the metre of the original; and how far this would have been compatible with that ease and grace which so eminently characterize them may be open to question. The assonant verse of Calderon, which Shelley replaces by dramatic blank verse, is so foreign to our language, that he would have lost much and gained little by an attempt to imitate it in English, such as some translators have made. The solemn and sonorous effect of the Spanish assonance is scarcely reproducible in English; but perhaps the verse of Chaucer's *House of Fame* or of Browning's *Christmas Eve* would be a better equivalent for the verse of Calderon than blank verse.

The fragments from the *Magico Prodigioso* make the reader long that Shelley had translated this fine play in its entirety. In the first scene the philosopher Cyprian, attended by two servants with his books, has

left Antioch, on the day of a festival of Jupiter, to study in peace in a grove near the city. There the Demon who is his Mephistopheles finds him studying Pliny's definition of the Deity, and enters into an argument with him on the subject. This argument with the Demon is a fine specimen of Shelley's somewhat free but vigorous and spirited translation.

As an instance of his deliberate alteration of an image of Calderon's into one more after his own heart, the following lines at the end of Cyprian's first speech may be cited. The Spanish runs thus:

> " Idos los dos á Antioquia
> Gozad de sus fiestas varias,
> Y volved por mi á este sitio,
> Cuando el sol cayendo vaya
> Á sepultarse en las ondas,
> Que entre obscuras nubes pardas
> Al gran cadavér de oro
> Son monumentas de plata."

This may be roughly translated:

> Now off to Antioch, ye two, and feast
> Your heart with all its joys. Return for me
> When the sun, dying, seeks his sepulchre
> Beneath the waves, which gleam among the grey
> And sombre clouds, o'er his great corpse of gold,
> Like monuments of silver.

What Calderon had in his mind in speaking of the waves as "among the clouds" is not quite clear; and Shelley reforms the passage thus, giving a plausible interpretation of the words while changing the imagery:

> " You, my friends,
> Go and enjoy the festival; it will

Be worth the labour, and return for me
When the sun seeks its grave among the billows
Which among dim grey clouds on the horizon,
Dance like white plumes upon a hearse."

Shelley is at his best in the lyrical passages in the scene by the sea-shore, in which most English readers will judge him to have surpassed his original. Cyprian's soliloquy before the tempest, though not so fine as the description of the shipwreck which follows, may be quoted, being shorter:

" Confusa memoria mia,
No tan poderosa estés,
Que me persuadas, que es
Otra alma la que me guia.
Idólatra me cegué,
Ambicioso me perdí,
Porque una hermosura ví,
Porque una deidad miré ;
Y entre confusos desvelos
De un equívoco rigor,
Conozco á quien tengo amor,
Y no de quien tengo zelos.
Y tanto aquesta pasion
Arrastra mi pensamiento,
Tanto (ay de mí !) este tormento
Lleva mi imaginacion,
Que diera (despecho es loco,
Indigno de un noble ingenio)
Al mas diabólico genio,
(Harto al infierno provoco)
Ya rendido y ya sujeto
Á penar y padecer,
Por gozar esta muger,
Diera el alma.
Demonio. Yo la aceto."

Shelley substitutes for the Spanish *redondilla* our more rapid octosyllabic verse:

"*Cyprian.*

O memory! permit it not
That the tyrant of my thought
Be another soul that still
Holds dominion o'er the will;
That would refuse, but can no more,
To bend, to tremble, and adore.
Vain idolatry!—I saw,
And gazing became blind with error!
Weak ambition, which the awe
Of her presence bound to terror!
So beautiful she was—and I,
Between my love and jealousy,
Am so convulsed with hope and fear,
Unworthy as it may appear;—
So bitter is the life I live,
That, hear me, Hell! I now would give
To thy most detested spirit
My soul, for ever to inherit,
To suffer punishment and pine,
So this woman may be mine.
Hear'st thou, Hell! dost thou reject it?
My soul is offered!

Demon (*unseen*).

I accept it."

Perhaps the greatest triumph of translation is, however, in the beautiful scene where Justina is tempted by the unseen chorus of spirits, who sing to her of love. Nothing could be better than the rendering of Justina's appeal to the nightingale, whose song seems to reiterate in her half-yielding ear the word love:

"Aquel ruiseñor amante
Es quien respuesta mi da,
Enamorado constante
Á su consorte, que está
Un ramo mas adelante.

Calla, ruiseñor ; no aqui
Imaginar me hagas ya,
Por las quejas que te oí,
Como un hombre sentirá,
Si siente un pájaro asi."

" 'Tis that enamour'd nightingale
Who gives me the reply :
He ever tells the same soft tale
Of passion and of constancy
To his mate, who, rapt and fond,
Listening sits, a bough beyond.

" Be silent, nightingale !—no more
Make me think, in hearing thee
Thus tenderly thy love deplore,
If a bird can feel his so,
What a man would feel for me."

In the first of these two verses Shelley is on a level with his original, and though the second does not give the exact sense of the Spanish, the force of the beautiful word *quejas* being imperfectly given in *deplore*, and Calderon's "what a man could feel" being preferable to the more particular "what a man would feel for me," it is beautiful. The passage about the vine which follows, daintily as it is done, is marred by the word *sophist*, which is put in as a rhyme to *lovest*, and corresponds to nothing in the original. Shelley too misses the restless turning of Justina's mind from object to object, conveyed in the words—

" *Mas no ;* una vid fue lasciva," etc.,

and—

" *Y si no es la vid, será*
Aquel girasol," etc.

She does not merely address the nightingale, vine, and sunflower one after the other in a rhetorical manner, as in the translation. She turns away from one to be caught by the other, first imbibing the sweet poison, and then addressing the source from which she has imbibed it. The bit about the sunflower is less simple than the original, and has little of the pleading pathos of the Spanish. The melancholy earnestness and passionate tenderness of the reiterated appeal to the sunflower:

> "No sigas, no, tus enojos,
> Flor, con marchitos despojos"—

is quite lost in the English version, in which it is vaguely confounded with the lines which precede and follow it.

> "Follow not his faithless glance
> With thy faded countenance,
> Nor teach my beating heart to fear," etc.

Here the real force of the appeal is completely missed. So also in the lines—

> "Si asi lloran unas hojas
> Como lloran unos ojos,"
>
> [If thus a few leaves mourn
> How weep some eyes]

the word *thus* is missed, though made specially emphatic by Calderon, who thrice reiterates the words *if thus*, in connection with nightingale, vine, and sunflower. In the concluding passage of the speech, the word *bower* in the line—

> "Leafy vine, unwreathe thy bower,"

seems slightly weak as an expression of the vine's passionate clinging. On the other hand, the adjective *restless* in the line—

"Restless sunflower, cease to move,"

as a translation of—

"Párate, *inconstante* flor,"

is one of those flashes of bright intuition, so common in Shelley, so rare in other translators.

The next speech of Justina, in which the English version lapses into blank verse, reads as if Shelley had lost interest in his work, and thrown off a makeshift translation to connect his lyrical passages with the scene between Justina and the Demon. Both the passion and the metrical beauty of Calderon's *redondillas* are lost in Shelley's tame blank verse.

It is needless to pursue the analysis of this translation further. Such a passage as that just referred to, which is neither good Shelley nor good Calderon, tempts us to question the use or propriety of attempts to render the great works of one nation in the language of another. If Shelley fails, who shall succeed? Other passages, again, are so beautifully rendered that we are tempted to wish that he had spent more time on such translations, forgetting that this might have interfered with his original work. Whatever be the absolute value of translation, it is a delicate intellectual feat which has a fascination for both performer and spectator; and Shelley's genius plays, in this as in other directions,

with so divine a grace that the words of Florizel to Perdita rise in the heart in thinking of it :

> "When you do dance, I wish you
> A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that ; move still, still so,
> And own no other function : each your doing,
> So singular in each particular
> Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,
> That all your acts are queens."

Shelley was well satisfied with his Calderon scenes, as on the whole he well might be ; while he felt that in Goethe he had at least met his match. In a letter to Mr. Gisborne he says, "I have—imagine my presumption—translated several scenes from both [the *Magico Prodigioso* and *Faust*], as the basis of a paper for our journal. I am well content with those from Calderon, which in fact gave me very little trouble ; but those from *Faust*—I feel how imperfect a representation, even with all the license I assume to figure to myself how Goethe would have written in English, my words convey. No one but Coleridge is capable of this work." Here he states his principle of translation, namely, that the translator should write an English poem in the spirit and with the sense of his author. That he should allow himself a certain license in the metres chosen to represent those of the original is a necessary corollary from this principle, and in the translations from the Spanish the English reader loses little or nothing by the change of metre—where the change is from short-lined assonant verse to blank verse. Assonant verse has never become naturalized

in English, and to write in it would have been a mechanical exercise—a clogging of the free wings of the English poet's genius. In translating from the German, a language with a metrical system similar to our own, the case is widely different, and in substituting blank verse for Goethe's rhymed lines, the result is most unfortunate. The translation of the Prologue in Heaven is infinitely below the original in spontaneous vitality. It reads *like* a translation. Goethe would not have written like this were he an Englishman. As a piece of mere verbal translation, there are, indeed, verbal felicities which mark the master of language; and its general accuracy contrasts favourably with the loose work of Anster, for instance, which is not very wonderful when the increased difficulty of rhymed instead of blank verse is taken into consideration. Among the many respectable but inadequate translations of this scene, Shelley's takes a more than respectable place. This is all that can be said of it; and he has himself taught us to expect from him much more than this. We expect nothing less than the *élan*, spontaneity, and perfection of an original work. We demand the impossible from him, and are inclined to quarrel with him when he fails to achieve this, as he sometimes does.

The songs of the Archangels with which the scene opens are distinctly a failure in the English version. The full sonorous music, which seems, in Goethe's verse, to roll on through its appointed cycles with a swift majestic strength, like that of the primæval forces

it sings, is not reproduced in Shelley's. This he was himself the first to perceive and acknowledge. "It is impossible," he says, "to represent in another language the melody of the versification; even the volatile strength and delicacy of the ideas escape in the crucible of translation, and the reader is surprised to find a *caput mortuum*." The two really good lines—

> "The world's unwither'd countenance
> Is bright as at creation's day,"

which Goethe might possibly have written in English, are a very free rendering of the German:

> "Die unbegreiflich hohen Werke
> Sind herrlich wie am ersten Tag."

The two lines in which there is a break in the middle—

> "With thunder speed: the angels even"—

and—

> "With deep and dreadful night; the sea"—

tend to check the elemental flow of the rhythm; and the changes of metre which Shelley has introduced seem awkward and slovenly as an equivalent for Goethe's unvarying verse.

In the dialogue between the Lord and Mephistopheles much of the dramatic point evaporates, one scarcely sees how, in the process of translation. The cynical humour of Mephistopheles, which, in the august presence in which he stands, twinkles harmlessly like that of a privileged court-jester, and the grave paternal courtesy of the Lord, so graphically depicted in Goethe's

full-toned canvas, come out but faintly in Shelley's water-colour drawing. How he could have imagined for a moment that his flat and lustreless blank-verse was an equivalent for the sparkling verse of the original, in which the subtly interwoven rhymes are made instruments of the most delicate expression, passes comprehension. Here, for once, if he were not Shelley, we should call him prosaic. The fire of life, the grace, the poetry of Goethe have indeed evaporated in his crucible!

As an instance of that haste or carelessness which is one of his besetting sins as a translator, the following passage from a speech of Mephistopheles may be cited:

> "Wenn ich zu meinem Zweck gelange,
> Erlaubt ihr mir Triumph aus voller Brust."

Shelley reverses the sense, and writes:

> "And if I lose, then 'tis your turn to crow;
> Enjoy your triumph then with a full breast."

In the conclusion of the Lord's last speech he also goes astray from sheer carelessness. Whatever be the general sense of this obscure passage, *dauernden Gedanken* certainly does not mean "sweet and melancholy thoughts." Slips like these make us wonder what Shelley might have achieved had he taken pains with his translations, instead of improvising them.

He is quite in his element in the *Walpurgisnacht*, and his splendid translation of the scene is perhaps his greatest feat in this line. Here the blank verse, though

not reproducing the bewildering movement of the original, is at least fine poetical blank verse which usually accurately gives the sense. The lyrical passages also are full of life, and often give the essential thought of the German with magical felicity. It would be invidious to pause over the small slips which here and there occur, or to object to the occasional expansion and dilution of the original, or even variations from it, in which Shelley has indulged. As a whole, this beautiful study may take its place beside the magnificent picture of which it is no feeble copy, and the beauties of which it enhances, not by contrasted failure, but by contrasted success. It is pleasant to think that Goethe himself courteously expressed his gratification in receiving such a tribute to his genius as this translation.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE WITCH OF ATLAS"—"EPIPSYCHIDION."

WE now come to the last beautiful group of poems left by Shelley—some of them unfortunately mere fragments, but all instinct with apparently quenchless vitality, which glows through the body of consummate artistic workmanship in which it is enshrined, and seems to promise the world an endless host of future works, as sublime in their scope as any he had yet given it, and in form even more perfect. This most perfectly lyrical life of which we have any record was cut short in its glorious noon, as if death, jealous of its marvellous fecundity, aimed at it a treacherous stroke in eager and unseemly haste; as if one of the trees of Paradise, upon the branches of which rich fruit was already ripening among ever-budding flowers, were suddenly laid low by the pitiless axe of a hurricane. In the poems of the years immediately preceding his death, even a cursory reader must be struck by the apparently inexhaustible fecundity of the poet's genius; by his astonishing versatility in turning his creative efforts in new directions remote from his

ordinary habits of mind; and by the gracious ease with which his spirit fills the new regions it has conquered with its pure ethereal atmosphere.

We may commence our survey of the group with two poems, which, for convenience' sake, may be classed together as phantasies, though of very different import: the one, *The Witch of Atlas*, being a mere extravaganza; the other, *Epipsychidion*, a mystical romance which deals with the most subtle philosophy of platonic love.

"WITCH OF ATLAS," ETC.

The Witch of Atlas is a piece of extravagant phantasy, to be silently enjoyed rather than studied seriously. In this poem Shelley's imagination, like a happy child, plays with the materials of poetry, surrounding itself with the things it loves best, and gloating over them as they lie strewn about in that apparent confusion of a child's play, so bewildering to outsiders of the practical world. The Witch is probably an incarnation of the Spirit of Beauty in a playful mood; but it would be idle to spend time in trying to interpret the beautiful fancies so wantonly woven together into any consistent myth. As a piece of delicate verse-writing in that most difficult of stanzas, the *ottava rima*, the poem, written in August, 1820, in three days, after an ascent of Monte Pellegrino from the Baths of San Giuliano, is an evidence of the perfect mastery of his art now attained by Shelley.

About this time he appears to have had a predilection for this Italian stanza, which has such a wonderful

range of expression, grave or gay. His first important work in it was the *Hymn to Mercury*, written about 1818; and in 1820 he wrote *The Question*, and in 1822 *The Zucca*, also in this stanza. *The Question* is, perhaps, his most delicate performance in *ottava rima.* The opening has the tender gravity of one of Shakspeare's sonnets:

"I dream'd that, as I wander'd by the way,
Bare winter suddenly was changed to spring;
And gentle odours led my steps astray,
Mix'd with a sound of waters murmuring
Along a shelving bank of turf, which lay
Under a copse, and hardly dared to fling
Its green arms round the bosom of the stream,
But kiss'd it and then fled, as thou mightest in dream." *

The description of the flowers gathered by the poet is very lovely; but the strange question with which the last stanza ends is what gives its tone of weird melancholy to the poem. It is like an unexpected close in a minor key, and converts the tender solemnity of the first stanza into tremulous awe:

"Methought that of these visionary flowers
I made a nosegay, bound in such a way
That the same hues which in their natural bowers
Were mingled or opposed, the like array

* This last line rather mars the music with its redundancy, which, even if we read *might'st* for *mightest*, is of a harsh kind; and the line can scarcely be intended for an Alexandrine, as Mr. Rossetti prints it. Even a good Alexandrine would be an unwarrantable license, as it would quite spoil the balance of the stanza; and this would be a somewhat lame one. "As might a dream" would reduce the metre to rigid rule, but would also reduce the simile from the quaint and extravagant one which Shelley possibly intended to a more commonplace one.

Kept these imprison'd children of the Hours
Within my hand,—and then, elate and gay,
I hasten'd to the spot whence I had come,
That I might there present it—oh! to whom?"

The Zucca is a fragment of a beautiful poem, and, though written later, may serve as an introduction to *Epipsychidion*, being, like it, a sigh after the unattainable. Indeed, many of the poems of this period are particularly full of that yearning after the ideal so characteristic of Shelley—the lines *I pant for the music which is divine*, for instance. The first stanza of *The Zucca* expresses this spiritual craving more directly:

"Summer was dead, and Autumn was expiring,
And infant Winter laugh'd upon the land
All cloudlessly and cold;—when I, desiring
More in this world than any understand,
Wept o'er the beauty, which, like sea retiring,
Had left the earth bare as the wave-worn sand
Of my lone heart, and o'er the grass and flowers
Pale for the falsehood of the flattering hours."

He then nakedly expresses that feeling of love for something above mortality which is more passionately expressed in *Epipsychidion*, because in that poem Emilia Viviani is addressed as an incarnation of this ideal being, which he here addresses in its unknown essence, putting aside all earthly loves with a gentle sigh of unsatisfied affection:

"I loved—O no! I mean not one of ye,
Or any earthly one, though ye are dear
As human heart to human heart may be;—
I loved, I know not what—but this low sphere,

And all that it contains, contains not thee,
Thou whom, seen nowhere, I feel everywhere,
From heaven and earth, and all that in them are,
Veil'd art thou, like a * [storm-benighted] star :

" By heaven and earth, from all whose shapes thou flowest,
Neither to be contain'd, delay'd, nor hidden,
Making divine the loftiest and the lowest,
Where for a moment thou art not forbidden
To live within the life which thou bestowest ;
And leaving noblest things vacant and chidden,
Cold as a corpse after the spirit's flight,
Blank as the sun after the birth of night.

" In winds, and trees, and streams, and all things common,
In music, and the sweet unconscious tone
Of animals, and voices which are human,
Meant to express some feelings of their own ;
In the soft motions and rare smile of woman,
In flowers and leaves, and in the grass fresh-shown,
Or dying in the autumn, I the most
Adore thee present, or lament thee lost."

In these stanzas we have a reminiscence of that Spirit of Intellectual Beauty which was the object of his perpetual worship under various aspects and names. Here it assumes the form of the Spirit of Nature rather than that of the Spirit of Love. In *Epipsychidion* it appears in the mortal shape of Emilia, as the Spirit of Love, or Venus Urania of *Prince Athanase.* From these, and other poems of his maturest time, it is evident that Shelley believed in the objective existence of a Soul of the Universe—a Holy Spirit in which all things "live, move, and have their being ;" and that, as his perception

* Mr. Rossetti suggests this as a probable reading of the epithet obscurely written in Shelley's note-book.

of its existence became more distinct, his yearning for some more perfect union with it became more intense.

"EPIPSYCHIDION."

Epipsychidion is a splendid rhapsody on love, which expresses in a more complete and intellectual form that philosophy of which the song *Life of Life* in *Prometheus Unbound* is the simple emotional expression. It is the product of a wild attempt, like that of the Poet in *Alastor*, to clasp a beautiful dream, this being made in the present instance with a full consciousness that the dream is not to be thus clasped. It was published as the production of a dead poet, and to Leigh Hunt he wrote of it as "a portion of me ready dead." In another letter he says, "The *Epipsychidion* I cannot look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the Centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace. If you are curious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal." Mr. Symonds, in commenting on this passage, says that it "justifies the conclusion that he had utilized his feeling for Emilia to express a favourite doctrine in impassioned verse." This is, perhaps, too coarse a manner of putting the truth

—*utilized* is too practical and deliberate a word to use in connection with this "nympholepsy of a fond despair." Shelley was not the man self-consciously to seek for philosophic or artistic culture in this Goethe-like manner. What Mr. Symonds says further on about Shelley's spurious platonism is, no doubt, in the main true: "Plato treats the love of a beautiful person as a mere initiation into divine mysteries, the first step in the ladder that ascends to heaven. When a man has formed a just conception of the universal beauty, he looks back with a smile upon those who find their soul's sphere in the love of some mere mortal object. Tested by this standard, Shelley's identification of Intellectual Beauty with so many daughters of earth, and his worshipping love of Emilia, is spurious platonism." His pantheism was always clothing itself in anthropomorphic forms. If he strongly felt the unsatisfactoriness of the love of finite and transitory things, he also felt the unsatisfactoriness of that of infinite and eternal things, and remained vibrating between the two, panting for union with some being in whom both should be harmonized. He found such a being diffused throughout nature, but evading him there, and he sought eagerly for its highest incarnation in humanity, but without success, as the stanzas quoted from *The Zucca* show. It would be easy to confound this yearning with the Christian mystic's seeking a union with God through Christ; but it would appear to have been something different from this. He sought to be reconciled, not with God, but with the world. The sense of personal sin, and of the need of regeneration

for himself, weighed upon him no more than it weighed upon Adam in Paradise; but neither the Spirit of Nature, nor the average human beings he met, could fill his heart with that rest of perfect companionship which he craved. Adam in Eden felt himself lonely and unsatisfied, though living in the full sunshine of God's smile, and obtained an Eve—with what result we all know. Shelley, if he had met God walking among the trees of the ruined Eden in which we dwell now-a-days, would have run to meet his Creator, like an aweless child, demanding first a perfect theory of the universe, and secondly, to use the words of Walt Whitman, a woman sufficient for him. "Some of us," he says in a letter to Mr. Gisborne, in which he mentions *Epipsychidion*, "have, in a prior existence, been in love with an Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie." Whether, if the Creator had provided him with an Antigone, or had even vivified his own Cythna, as Love did Pygmalion's image, he would have found full content in his consort, who shall say? The masculine ideal has an awkward habit of transcending the boundaries of each object which seemed at first to contain it—each becomes the chrysalis of a butterfly which flits to a new one, where it lives for a moment, and then dies into a chrysalis again. With women, at least in the case of love, it is not so often so—the imagination acts on the side of constancy, and cages this butterfly of the ideal where it first sprang to birth. Shelley was a spurious Platonist inasmuch as he did his best to idealize Emilia Viviani into a goddess; but the attempt was a splendid failure.

In the exordium of *Epipsychidion*, Shelley addresses Emilia as though she were the supreme incarnation of the ideal which he had been seeking through the world all his life—as though Asia herself stood before him in the revealing veil of a perfect woman's form :

> "Seraph of heaven! too gentle to be human,
> Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman
> All that is insupportable in thee
> Of light and love and immortality!
> Sweet benediction in the eternal curse!
> Veil'd glory of this lampless universe!
> Thou moon beyond the clouds! Thou living form
> Among the dead! Thou star above the storm!
> Thou wonder, and thou beauty, and thou terror!
> Thou harmony of Nature's art! Thou mirror
> In whom, as in the splendour of the sun,
> All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on!
>
> "I never thought before my death to see
> Youth's vision thus made perfect."

He declares that he loves her, and wishes she had been born his sister, or that his name could be made a "sister's bond" between her and his wife, whose sister he has declared her in the opening lines :

> "Sweet Spirit, sister of that orphan one
> Whose empire is the name thou weepest on."

He is not only hers, but a part of her. His muse singes its wings in her splendour.

Then follows a passionate description of her apparition in his life :

> "She met me, Stranger, upon life's rough way,
> And lured me towards sweet death;" etc.

This concludes with the following lovely lines:—

> "Warm fragrance seems to fall from her light dress,
> And her loose hair; and, where some heavy tress
> The air of her own speed has disentwined,
> The sweetness seems to satiate the faint wind;
> And in the soul a wild odour is felt,
> Beyond the sense, like fiery dews that melt
> Into the bosom of a frozen bud.
> See where she stands! a mortal shape indued
> With love and life and light and deity,
> And motion which may change but cannot die;
> An image of some bright eternity;
> A shadow of some golden dream; a splendour
> Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender
> Reflection of the eternal moon of love
> Under whose motions life's dull billows move;
> A metaphor of spring and youth and morning;
> A vision like incarnate April, warning
> With smiles and tears Frost the anatomy
> Into his summer grave."

She is his spouse, his sister, his angel—the pilot of his starless fate, too late beloved, too soon adored. She should either have lived beside him from his birth, as a mortal shadow of the divine substance which she is, or he should first have worshipped this substance in some divine place outside the sphere of mortality. Yet, even as it is, her love has set a seal on the fountains of his heart to keep them pure. There does not appear to be any conscious exaggeration in this description of Emilia's influence upon him. Her really intense and exceptional character, seen through the sunshine of his own imagination, produced the most important spiritual impression that his mind had received since that first contact with the Spirit

of Beauty in his schoolboy days made him shriek and clasp his hands in ecstasy. Her platonic spirit really did clash upon his with a sweet and vitalizing shock. His love for her was really a critical moment in his life, raising him to a spiritual ether of intenser passion, and revealing clearly secrets of ideal love before but dimly seen. *Epipsychidion* is a poem of more genuine passion than Mr. Symonds is disposed to admit. It was only *after* this sublime flight that the wings of his imagination flagged, and he sank back to the light of common day. The poem proceeds:

> "Thy wisdom speaks in me, and bids me dare
> Beacon the rocks on which high hearts are wreck'd.
> I never was attach'd to that great sect
> Whose doctrine is that each one should select
> Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
> And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
> To cold oblivion. . . .
> True love in this differs from gold and clay,
> That to divide is not to take away.
> Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
> Gazing on many truths."

Leaving Shelley's general doctrine respecting marriage, which is touched upon in the above passage, for future discussion, it is sufficient here to observe that it would be falling into the very mistake which the poet himself protests against, and confounding this ideal platonic passion with the love affairs "of a servant-girl and her sweetheart," if we were to understand these lines as a plea for inconstancy. They are a defence of the apparent inconstancy produced by this platonic passion. To understand the nature of the wide-ranging love of

which he here speaks, we must turn to his definition of love in the prose essay, *On Love:* "Thou demandest what is Love. It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves." Nuptial love he regards as merely a particular phase of this passion; the "one mistress" not being defrauded by these excursions of her lover's spirit into the free ether of universal love. This is a hard doctrine for the one mistress to receive, when these excursions take the shape of a worship of the beautiful, not merely in flowers, and clouds, and lakes, and mountains, but in other women, especially when it gives birth to an utterance so passionate as *Epipsychidion.* Shelley might possibly have said to his wife, and said truly, "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not the Spirit of Beauty, as it appeared to me in Emilia Viviani, more;" yet this poem, which breathes something very like ideal infidelity, must have agitated her heart with the question: "Can she, then, be more to him than I?" The love existing between her and her husband must have been deeper and more perfect than is usually the case, to enable her to regard this poem in its true light, as a romance outside of space and time—the song of the elemental spirit imprisoned in that "frail universe" known among men as Shelley, which any mortal love must have left unsatisfied. If their union had more nearly approached the ideal

perfection of nuptial love, the world would probably have lost this most mystical of love-songs, or it might at least have assumed a less perplexingly quasi-personal form. Mrs. Shelley herself, with that bright candour and intelligence which characterized her, acknowledges —probably, as Mr. Forman suggests, with remorseful exaggeration—in her poem on Shelley's death entitled *The Choice*, that he had reason to complain of her coldness :

> " O gentle Spirit ! thou hast often sung,
> How fallen on evil days thy heart was wrung ;
> Now fierce remorse and unreplying death
> Waken a chord within my heart, whose breath,
> Thrilling and keen, in accents audible
> A tale of unrequited love doth tell.
> It was not anger,—while thy earthly dress
> Encompass'd still thy soul's rare loveliness,
> All anger was atoned by many a kind
> Caress or tear, that spoke the soften'd mind.—
> It speaks of cold neglect, averted eyes,
> That blindly crush'd thy soul's fond sacrifice :—
> My heart was all thine own,—but yet a shell
> Closed in its core, which seem'd impenetrable,
> Till sharp-tooth'd misery tore the husk in twain,
> Which gaping lies, nor may unite again."

The enigmatic lines addressed to Edward Williams, *The serpent is shut out from Paradise*, seem to show that there were times when Shelley did acutely feel such coldness on Mary's part. They read like the plaint of a child-angel, rebuked with cold looks where he expected kisses, and disposed to think himself very hardly used in consequence :

> " When I return to my cold home, you ask
> Why I am not as I have ever been.

You spoil me for the task
Of acting a forced part on life's dull scene,—
Of wearing on my brow the idle mask
Of author, great or mean,
In the world's carnival. I sought
Peace thus, and but in you I found it not."

Mary Shelley was evidently as far above narrow jealousy as Williams himself, as her unbroken friendship for Mrs. Williams—the heroine of the exquisite group of poems *To Jane*, which breathe an ethereal ardour as innocent as it is delicate and tender—abundantly proves. Her coldness, real or apparent, was probably due to certain intellectual qualities inherited from her father, which were incompatible with that swift instinctive sympathy and spirit-kindling flame of spiritual enthusiasm which Shelley found or imagined in Emilia.

Shelley's relations with women were apt to run into a poetical passion which vibrated between friendship and love, and tended to confound the boundaries of the two; a form of ideal platonism which would, no doubt, have been most perilous with a nature less pure than his, and if it had been less purely poetical. True and warm friendship between persons of different sexes is among the noblest products of social refinement; the conditions necessary for its existence are those necessary for the existence of pure love; but in the practical world friendship and love, however close their connection, should not be confounded, and should not wantonly masquerade in each other's garments. It would be most unjust to Shelley to accuse him of

being tainted with that strange sexual hectic which is consuming us at the present day, at least in any of its grosser forms; to suppose, for instance, that he seriously desired to merge all delicate distinctions of sexual relationship in what Walt Whitman finely calls "tepid amorousness," without the honest rage of mere appetite or the spiritual ardour of true passion. Indeed, he particularly tells Godwin, in writing to him about *Laon and Cythna*, that he is "formed to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling, whether relative to external nature or the living beings which surround us." Yet it is hard to acquit his philosophy of a tendency to annul one-half of the great law of social gravitation, the centrifugal force which differentiates emotion from emotion and relationship from relationship, and to send all the planets of friendship and sisterly affection flying into the sun of love, which their airy dance alone maintains in its place. Hence the ethical blot upon *Laon and Cythna*, otherwise so pure, the audacious spiritual ugliness of which is almost swallowed up by its monstrous absurdity, regarded from the standpoint of common sense.

To return to *Epipsychidion*. The paragraph last quoted concludes with a sentence which tends to show that Shelley's platonism was, in theory at least, less spurious than Mr. Symonds imagines:

> "Narrow
> The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
> The life that wears, the spirit that creates,
> One object and one form, and builds thereby
> A sepulchre for its eternity!"

That is to say, every particular image of beauty should be regarded merely *as* an image, through which the spirit should press on to closer contact with the eternal Spirit of Beauty. Otherwise that which should be merely a vestibule becomes a sepulchre. Each individual form is but a rung of Plato's divine ladder.

The next paragraph contains a thought as true as it is beautiful:

> "Mind from its object differs most in this:
> Evil from good; misery from happiness;
> The baser from the nobler; the impure
> And frail from what is clear and must endure.
> If you divide suffering or dross, you may
> Diminish till it is consumed away;
> If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
> Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
> How much, while any yet remains unshared,
> Of pleasure may be gain'd, of sorrow spared."

What concentrates mere external calamity into spiritual evil is isolation. The soul's solitude is the soul's death; for it is thus sepulchred from the divine atmosphere of universal Love. The same idea occurs in the already-quoted prose essay, *On Love*, so beautiful and so brief: "Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they sympathize not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, and the waters, and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring, in the blue air, there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them, which, by their inconceivable

relation to something within the soul, awaken the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone. Sterne says that if he were in a desert, he would love some cypress. So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was."

In the last lines of the passage just quoted from the poem, there is a glimpse of a deep truth which is not very clearly stated anywhere by Shelley, though obscurely contained in the myth of Prometheus, but which is the vital truth of Christianity, namely, that it is the very injustice of the world's laws which produces the world's advance to a higher spiritual plane. If the innocent did not suffer for the guilty, every man would be shut into his own solitary hell to all eternity. It is the shock of pity and fear produced by the sense that his own sin has brought suffering upon others that raises him from the pit of selfish agony into the atmosphere of divine Love. Every martyr is a portion of that "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," of which Christ is the supreme incarnation—that redeeming Love which by suffering "woes that hope thinks infinite," by forgiving "wrongs darker than death or night," converts evil itself into good, and thus enables hope to create "from its own wreck the thing it contemplates."

Universal sympathy, by sharing the burden of individual sorrow and sin among all mankind, would diminish

them, and by diffusing individual joy would increase it. This is a great truth here incidentally touched by Shelley. The nature of sorrow and sin is to become concentrated by being hidden away from the light of day in the individual heart. They evaporate like noxious vapours in the vivifying air of human sympathy ; but joy and love, like the loaves which fed the ten thousand, increase as they are shared. If our sympathies were perfect, a thrill, like that which Dante felt to run through the mountain of Purgatory when a ransomed soul passed into Paradise, would run through the world whenever a human heart turned from sorrow to joy, from the dungeon of evil to the sunlight of good :

> "This truth is that deep well whence sages draw
> The unenvied light of hope ; the eternal law
> By which those live to whom this world of life
> Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
> Tills for the promise of a later birth
> The wilderness of this Elysian earth."

We now come to the autobiographic and most enigmatic portion of the poem. This opens with an account of his first perception of the presence of the Spirit of Beauty in the universe, of which we have already heard in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, and in the Dedication to *Laon and Cythna :*

> "On an imagined shore,
> Under the grey beak of some promontory,
> She met me, robed in such exceeding glory
> That I beheld her not."

He then tells how, like the Poet of *Alastor*, he sought his

ideal through the world, but could never find her, though told by a mysterious voice that she was beside him. He then went forth, stumbling in his weakness and his haste, hoping to find one form resembling hers :

> " There, one whose voice was venom'd melody
> Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers.
> The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers ;
> Her touch was as electric poison ; flame
> Out of her looks into my vitals came ;
> And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
> A killing air which pierced like honey-dew
> Into the core of my green heart, and lay
> Upon its leaves ; until, as hair grown grey
> O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
> With ruins of unseasonable time."

Now, what are we to understand as to this personage ? Was she a real woman or a personification ? To which we are pretty safe in replying : Possibly a real woman, certainly a personification, just as Emily herself is. Jacob Böhme, in one of his works, sees in the historical personages of the Old Testament a series of incarnations of mystical ideas, or spiritual conditions, and accordingly speaks of the state Adam, the state Abraham, the state Sarah, etc. In the present instance we know that the poem has for its heroine the state Emily, rather than the real flesh-and-blood woman ; and we may therefore infer that these subordinate personages are also rather states than persons. Perhaps I may venture to illustrate Shelley's myth by another of somewhat similar import. Every man who in youth becomes enamoured of the Ideal—whether in the form of ideal womanhood, or in any other phase of the Good, the True, or the

Beautiful—is met, in his search after it, by three Titanesses. The first is Lilith, or Desire; upon her he begets the demons of insatiable passion, which pursue him ever after. The second is Eve, or Disillusion, with whom he eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and is cast out of his youthful Paradise—"driven out and compelled to be chaste," as Blake says. Chastity, for both Blake and Shelley, is a type of submission to the actual —renunciation of the infinite, and is therefore hated by them. The chaste man, *i.e.* the man of prudence and self-control, is the man who has lost the nakedness of his primitive innocence. The third Titaness is the Madonna, the Reconciler, the perfect law of liberty, the Virgin Mother of pure love.

Some such myth as this, though not distinctly expressed in the poem, is behind the poem. Shelley is not so purely a mytho-poet as Blake. With Blake the mystical idea shines through the poem, like the sun through clear air; while with Shelley it is usually broken, confused, and half reflected, like sunshine gleaming through clouds. To comprehend Shelley, you must see distinctly the idea which he but half reveals, gazing through the beautiful clouds of semi-mystical poetry to the idea which, like the sun, lies behind the words rather than within them.

Let us now see what light this myth of ours will shed upon the obscurities of the poem. It is not difficult to connect the lady of the nightshade bower "whose voice was venomed melody" and whose touch electric poison, with the Pandemian Venus of the banquet of Plato, or

with that Dolores celebrated by Mr. Swinburne, whose true title—though with "the breath of her false mouth," which is "like faint flowers," she may call herself pleasure—is Our Lady of Pain. It is more difficult to see in what particular shape she appeared to Shelley. It would be rash to connect the name of Harriett with this personage, even as a "state" Harriett; yet the poet's first wife can scarcely be one of the "many mortal forms" in which he "rashly sought the image" of the Eternal Beauty—"that idol of my thought." He allowed her to take possession of him rather from a mistaken sense of honour than because he imagined that he had found his ideal in her—"not deceived, but fondly overcome with female charm;" and the passionate profession of love on her part, which induced him to marry this "splendid animal," may in its ideal aspect have seemed a seductive breath of the "false mouth" of the Pandemian Venus. It seems probable that Harriett *is* alluded to afterwards as that

> "Comet, beautiful and fierce,
> Who drew the heart of this frail universe
> Towards thine own; till, wreckt in that convulsion,
> Alternating attraction and repulsion,
> Thine went astray, and that was rent in twain."

Shelley's connection with Harriett—a union imperfect in sympathy and deficient in passion—was distinctly a sin against ideal Love, which was punished by internal chaos, "alternating attraction and repulsion," and external calamity. "Love," says Prosper Mérimée, "justifies all things; but we should be quite sure that it *is* love."

Shelley was anything but sure that it *was* love that united him to Harriett.

I am indebted to Mr. Rossetti for the very plausible suggestion that the lines:

> "In many mortal forms I rashly sought
> The shadow of that idol of my thought.
> And some were fair—but beauty dies away:
> Others were wise—but honeyed words betray:
> And One was true—oh! why not true to me?"

probably refer more particularly to the Boinville family, with whom Shelley was intimate in the period which elapsed between his marriage with Harriett and his acquaintance with Mary, or, to be more precise, during his residence in London in 1813–14, when his relations with Harriett had become distinctly unsatisfactory. Mr. Rossetti thinks that Mrs. Boinville's daughter Cornelia (married to the Mr. Newton whose "luminous and eloquent essay" in defence of Vegetarianism is immortalized in the Notes to *Queen Mab*) is alluded to in the words "Some were fair;" that "Others were wise," etc., characterizes Mrs. Boinville herself, whom Shelley considered "the most admirable specimen of a human being he had ever seen," but of whom he said also: "It was hardly possible for a person of the extreme subtlety and delicacy of Mrs. Boinville's understanding and affection to be quite sincere and constant;" while the one who was true, though not true to him, was Mrs. Taylor, a second daughter of Mrs. Boinville, with whom Shelley was hopelessly in love. To her the stanzas written in April, 1814, *Away, the moor is dark beneath the moon*, were addressed.

The following lines describe the chaos of unsatisfied desire :—

> "Then, as a hunted deer that could not flee,
> I turn'd upon my thoughts, and stood at bay,
> Wounded and weak and panting ; the cold day
> Trembled for pity of my strife and pain."

Then comes the obscurest portion of the poem, that in which the influence of the second personage is described:

> "When, like a noonday dawn, there shone again
> Deliverance. One stood on my path who seem'd
> As like the glorious shape which I had dream'd,
> As is the Moon, whose changes ever run
> Into themselves, to the eternal Sun ;
> The cold chaste Moon, the Queen of Heaven's bright isles,
> Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles—
> That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame,
> Which ever is transformed yet still the same,
> And warms not but illumines."

It will be observed that this Moon, or moonlike personage, appears when the poet is seeking rashly for the *shadow* of Eternal Beauty in "many mortal forms," not for its perfect *incarnation* in one supreme form. She is as like the glorious shape of whom he had dreamed as the moon is to the sun. She evidently represents the phenomenal rather than the eternal, and in the strange phrase "whose changes ever run into themselves," we have perhaps an obscure expression of the idea that the perpetual recurrence of phenomena never transcends the phenomenal—the same idea as recurs in the line in which the moon is described as ever "transformed yet still the same." This Moon, then, is the goddess of the

actual, who appears to us under the semblance of Content, and "makes all beautiful on which she smiles." She also would appear to be a type of intellect, which "warms not but illumines," as opposed to spirit or passion, which vivifies and kindles. She hides her votary from his own darkness in what Blake would call "clouds of reason," mesmerizing him into placid sleep. But content means continence—the restraint or drugging of "the desire of the moth for the star," the deadly chastity of Blake. He lies "in a chaste cold bed," neither alive nor dead; Death and Life fly over him like twin babes, "the wandering hopes of one abandoned mother." This is very obscure, but possibly Death and Life may be regarded as the children of the Spirit of Beauty (or of Nature) whom the sleeper has abandoned. Their strange cry, "Away, he is not of our crew," apparently disturbed his slumber, causing him to weep. Content thus becomes disillusion; the soul begins to see its own nakedness:

> "What storms then shook the ocean of my sleep,
> Blotting that Moon, whose pale and waning lips
> Then shrank as in the sickness of eclipse;
> And how my soul was as a lampless sea,
> And who was then its tempest; and when she,
> The Planet of that hour, was quench'd, what frost
> Crept o'er those waters, till from coast to coast
> The moving billows of my being fell
> Into a death of ice, immovable;
> And then—what earthquakes made it gape and split,
> The white Moon smiling all the while on it,
> These words conceal:—If not, each word would be
> The key of staunchless tears. Weep not for me!"

Content with the phenomenal world produces spiritual

death. In Browning's *Easter Day*, condemnation is pronounced on the soul in the words—

> "Thou art shut
> Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
> Thy sense upon the world."

Here a somewhat similar state is described. Mr. Rossetti conjectures, with some reason, that the storms which shook the ocean of the poet's sleep are symbolical of some actual incidents in his love-story—possibly of the almost contemporaneous suicides of his first wife, Harriett, and Fanny Godwin. "The planet of that hour" may have been the mysterious English lady who followed him to Italy and died at Naples. Leaving aside the personal allusions, the general drift of the passage leads us to contemplate the abomination of desolation of the soul that has forsaken its ideal.

We subsequently find that Mary is distinctly connected with this Moon goddess. The state Mary is equivalent to a condition of bondage to the actual. In marrying her Shelley married the imperfections of the phenomenal world.

At length the perfect Vision appears, radiating life from her presence, changing the winter of the spirit to spring:

> "Soft as an incarnation of the Sun,
> When light is changed to love, this glorious one
> Floated into the cavern where I lay,
> And called my spirit; and the dreaming clay
> Was lifted by the thing that dream'd below
> As smoke by fire, and in her beauty's glow

I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night
Was penetrating me with living light:
I knew it was the Vision veil'd from me
So many years—that it was Emily."

In this passage we have a vivid picture of the regeneration of the soul by Uranian Love. In the state Emily the icy bondage of the actual is broken through, the universe is felt to be permeated with the divine love, the Eternal Beauty becomes a living presence in the heart.

In the next passage Mary and Emily are

"Twin spheres of light who rule this passive earth,
This world of love, this *me;* and into birth
Awaken all its fruits and flowers, and dart
Magnetic warmth into its central heart."

The ideal and the actual are now reconciled, and blend their influence, like that of the Sun and Moon, to one sweet end. The "Comet beautiful and fierce," which, whether we consider it a state Harriett or not, is certainly typical of desire or passion, is also conjured to "float into our azure heaven again." But now it is to be "love's folding-star:"

"The living Sun will feed thee from its urn
Of golden fire."

Desire vivified by the Eternal Beauty is regenerated into love.

"The Moon will veil her horn
In thy last smiles."

This probably means that the transitoriness of the phenomenal, the decay of beauty, is veiled, or made insignificant, by the smile of love.

The remainder of the poem, describing the island to which Emily is to fly across the sea, requires no comment. It is simply a vision of perfect love, in verse as intense in imaginative passion as any ever written even by Shelley himself. "L'anima amante," as Emilia herself says, "sdegna essere ristretta, niente puo ritenerla. Essa si slancia fuori del creato, e si crea nell' infinito, un mondo tutto per essa, diverso assai da questo oscuro e pauroso baratro, assorta di continuo in un estasi dolcissima, e veramente beata." The eloquent discourse on love from which this passage is taken proves Emilia to have been a platonist after Shelley's own heart. Her platonism, so far as it did not spring from that "internal fountain" of genius which Mrs. Shelley says she possessed, was probably derived from Dante and Petrarch, who indeed were as much Shelley's inspirers as Plato himself.

Before leaving *Epipsychidion*, it is necessary to say a few words about the "free-love" doctrine expressed in the passage beginning, "Thy wisdom speaks in me." Shelley's theoretic objection to marriage was not, of course, affected by the happiness or unhappiness of his own experience of the bond. To the idealist, to whom love is of supreme importance, and "the code of modern morals," however venerable as the gradually raised scaffolding of the social structure, no more to be regarded as absolute and final than the British constitution, marriage seems an arbitrary and tyrannic yoke laid upon the neck of love. Shelley, indeed, had the practical common sense to see that any attempt to carry out his theories in their fullness was somewhat premature, and

must necessarily act injuriously upon his family, and therefore twice consented to undergo the objectionable bondage; but he does not seem to have materially altered his opinion from the time when, in the first burst of his juvenile enthusiasm, he thus inveighs against marriage in the Notes to *Queen Mab:* "Not even the intercourse of the sexes is exempt from the despotism of positive institution. Law pretends even to govern the indisciplinable wanderings of passion, to put fetters on the clearest deductions of reason, and, by appeals to the will, to subdue the involuntary affections of our nature. Love is inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness.

"How long, then, ought the sexual connection to last? What law ought to specify the extent of the grievances which should limit its duration? A husband and wife ought to continue so long united as they love each other; any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection, would be a most intolerable tyranny, and the most unworthy of toleration."

Shelley's ideal ethics bear much the same relation to the practical ethics of our social morality as free to applied mechanics. He deals as with forces acting in pure space, without allowing for the friction produced by the ignorance, selfishness, and brutality of the average man. His case might be stated simply thus: Where two persons love each other, marriage is superfluous; where they do not, it is the perpetuation of a false relation, and therefore immoral. This would be un-

answerable if pure love were the spontaneous product of the human mind, and not the ultimate fruit of the slow process of social evolution; and if the consequences of the sexual connection affected only the lovers, and had no importance for any other persons—their children, friends, and society in general. Shelley appears not to have had the faintest surmise of the fact that the idea of the family itself has been slowly evolved in the process of the transition from barbarism to civilization, and that sexual constancy, so far from being what he would call a natural product, has been called into existence, so far as it at present exists, by the most terrible system of deliberate culture. His hatred of marriage is only one branch of his hatred of government. When he talks of law pretending to govern the *indisciplinable* wanderings of passion, he is evidently quite unaware how disciplinable even our most elementary passions are, and how acquired habits gradually become transmitted instincts.

All government, from that of kings and priests to that of Mrs. Grundy, has for its object the protection of society from the selfishness of the individual, and of the individual from the injustice of society. It hedges about the feet of fools with beneficent restrictions, until they learn to walk circumspectly and decently; and marriage is only a particular instance of these restrictions upon wanton individualism, for the benefit of the commonwealth. Marriage is the bell-glass under which the modern idea of love, watered with the blood of adulterers and adulteresses, and the tears of ill-matched couples, has slowly germinated and come to such perfection as

it has as yet attained. Some day, we may hope, the delicate plant may become robust, and then we may break the bell-glass and plant it out without protection. Just as Moses gave the old Jews the law of divorce, though in the beginning it was not so, because of the hardness of their hearts, Christ gave the men of his generation the strict marriage-law, because of the hardness of *their* hearts, though in the kingdom of heaven there shall be no marrying or giving in marriage. Shelley comes to us, like a prophet of the kingdom of heaven, and tells us it is time to begin to think of breaking the bell-glass. "I conceive that, from the abolition of marriage, the fit and natural management of sexual connection would result. I by no means assert that the intercourse would be promiscuous: on the contrary; it appears, from the relation of parent to child, that this union is generally of long duration, and marked above all others with generosity and self-devotion." It may be quite true that the genius for love is now sufficiently developed in mankind to prevent free love from degenerating into free lust to any overwhelming extent; but that a fit and natural arrangement of sexual connection must result from the abolition of marriage is a fallacy resulting from Shelley's favourite assumption that mankind had been warped from a condition of primitive perfection by the artificial imposition of the restrictions of custom.

CHAPTER IX.

"ADONAIS"—"HELLAS"—DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS—"TRIUMPH OF LIFE."

"ADONAIS."

THE mystical fervour which glows in every line of *Epipsychidion* glows also in *Adonais*, that sweetest, yet sublimest, of dirges, written in the same year, 1821. Now, however, it appears with a more chastened splendour, shining through the artistic form which contains it, like the beauty of Persephone through Psyche's urn. Shelley himself uses the word *art*—a word not then, as now, vulgarized by the cant of dilettantism—in speaking of this poem: "It is a highly wrought *piece of art*, and perhaps better, in point of composition, than anything I have written." In this self-judgment he shows himself, as usual, full of the spirit of sober justice and sound critical feeling. *Adonais* must rank among the most perfect of his poems, for symmetry of design, united with rich elaboration of details. He has here done what Keats himself counselled him to do—filled every rift of his subject with ore.

It is somewhat strange to find a poem, like *Adonais*,

in which the versification is so consummately beautiful—each of the Spenserian stanzas being moulded as faultlessly as a flower, and in this contrasting with the cruder and hastier work in *Laon and Cythna*—preceded by a preface written in the worst prose Shelley wrote in his maturer years. It contains, indeed, those two beautiful sentences about the graveyard where Keats lies: "The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, covered in winter with violets and daisies. It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place." But, with this exception, there is little that has not something of a mawkish and spasmodic taint. The fact is that this preface was a somewhat botched-up affair. It is evident from the first sentence, and the cancelled passages that remain, that Shelley intended to have written a more fitting introduction to the poem, vindicating Keats's claim to a place among the great poets of the day; and it is also evident that the story, so derogatory to Keats, of his having died of a criticism, threw a somewhat lurid light over his champion's imagination. The false story struck a false chord of feeling in Shelley's mind.

Mr. Symonds, in his *Shelley*, has made such a complete study of *Adonais*, that little remains to be added. What he says of the manner in which Shelley imitated his Greek models sets the spirit of this imitation in its true light: "He chose as a foundation for his work those laments of Bion for Adonis, and of Moschus for Bion, which are the most pathetic products of Greek

idyllic poetry; and the transmutation of their material into the substance of highly spiritualized modern thought, reveals the potency of a Prospero's wand. It is a metamorphosis whereby the art of excellent but positive poets has been translated into the sphere of metaphysical imagination. Urania takes the place of Aphrodite; the thoughts and fancies and desires of the dead singer are substituted for Bion's cupids; and instead of mountain shepherds, the living bards of England are summoned to lament around the poet's bier. Yet it is only when Shelley frees himself from the influence of his models that he soars aloft on mighty wing."

The beautiful opening of the poem recalls Milton's *Lycidas;* but Shelley's conception is more delicate and spiritual than that of Milton in his splendid threnody, in which the grim figure of St. Peter bursts abruptly into the pastoral with all the daring incongruity of Renaissance art. Urania is a more gracious mourner. Shelley, too, gives a deeper meaning to the pastoral fiction, in the very characteristic stanza:

> "O weep for Adonais! The quick Dreams,
> The passion-winged ministers of thought,
> Who were his flocks, whom near the living streams
> Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught
> The love which was its music, wander not,—
> Wander no more, from kindling brain to brain,
> But droop there whence they sprung; and mourn their lot
> Round the cold heart, where, after their sweet pain,
> They ne'er will gather strength, nor find a home again."

The deepest thing in Milton's poem is an emotion secondary to the main one, his rage against the hireling

priests who neglect the souls committed to them as their pastoral charge. The deepest thing in Shelley's is his fascination as he gazes into the eyes of death. He asks the terrible questions we all ask in the presence of the dead, and the echoes of his voice through the cavern of the grave come back to him with ghostlike answers in their train. He does not wait long before these questions come to his lips. Spring returns to the dead earth; but life does not come back to the dead.

> "Nought we know dies. Shall that alone which knows
> Be as a sword consumed before the sheath
> By sightless lightning? The intense atom glows
> A moment, then is quench'd in a most cold repose.
>
> "Alas! that all we loved of him should be,
> But for our grief, as if it had not been,
> And grief itself be mortal! Woe is me!
> Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene
> The actors or spectators?"

The solemn peroration of the poem, beginning with the words—

> "Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
> He hath awaken'd from the dream of life;"

contains Shelley's most imaginative statement of his belief in immortality—a belief which was a faith rather than a creed. Mr. Rossetti thus sums up his views on this subject: "What, then, is the result? I take it to be this: that Shelley regarded the aspiration of man after individual immortality as *some* presumption in favour of that, and he himself had the aspiration in a marked degree; but at the same time he considered it

a mere presumption—unproved, incapable of proof, and exceedingly uncertain. He found it difficult to *con*ceive that man is mortal, and alike difficult to *per*ceive that he is immortal." This last sentence contains the gist of the matter. Philosophically speaking, he had no *belief* in immortality. He suspended judgment for lack of evidence. Trelawny reports that he asked him the direct question: "Do you believe in the immortality of the spirit?" and his reply was: "Certainly not: how can I? We know nothing: we have no evidence. We cannot express our inmost thoughts: they are incomprehensible even to ourselves." At the same time he felt, as Mrs. Shelley says in her preface to the *Essays and Letters*, that the question was not to be decided merely on the grounds of "reasoning and analogy." The "inextinguishable thirst for immortality" counts for something with him. "Until better arguments can be produced than sophisms which disgrace the cause," he says in one of the Notes to *Hellas*, "this desire itself must remain the strongest and the only presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being." In his poetry those "inmost thoughts" which are "incomprehensible to ourselves," striving for expression, inspire belief. Immortality is a truth of his imagination, though not of his reason; that is to say, it is an induction from the co-ordinated perceptions of his inmost consciousness, the actual truth of which can only be proved by the test of fact, which we are not in a position to apply to it. This may not be always the case. As Blake says, "What is now proved was once only imagined;" but, on the other hand, much

of what was once imagined is now disproved. It may be that we shall have to give up the idea of immortality as a vain dream; but when the day comes which thus buries our noblest hope in the grave, and makes the world itself the soul's charnel-house, a glory will have departed from the earth, and the dark riddle of life will be darker than ever.

The belief in a life beyond the grave was almost a corollary from Shelley's transcendental philosophy; but whether each particular mind is but a wavelet on the ocean of universal mind, from which it is apparently separated in the brief trance which we call life, and into which it sinks back at death, or whether each individual mind is an indestructible unit, are questions which he does not attempt to solve. If we live as individuals after death, it is probable that we may have lived before birth—an hypothesis which does not appear to have had much attraction for Shelley's imagination, as he but thrice, so far as I know, alludes to an ante-natal life in his poetry—in *Prince Athanase*, in *Epipsychidion*, and in *The Triumph of Life*, and in all three places merely as a passing thought. Indeed, his most passionate desire was, not for an increased individuality, but for some mystical fusion of his own personality with the Spirit of Divine Beauty. His hold on the phenomenal world was but slight, and death had a strange attractiveness for him, as the possible gate of a life more real than the present, because less severed from the eternal fountain of life. He felt some mighty power, some unimaginable Being, drawing him to itself, with

such cords of love and aspiration, that intervening death seemed a thing of but small account. His soul was a moth enamoured of the divine light that shines dimly through the phenomenal universe :

> " Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,
> If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek ! "

The concluding stanzas of the poem have a solemn intensity of inspiration which produces a sensation of awe in the reader's mind. A supernatural power seems really and sensibly to work in the poet's soul, and hurry it away into unknown regions of thought which words cannot illumine. If Shelley's spirit, at least, be not an immortal thing, life must be a mockery, and we mortals indeed the fools of time.

> " That Light whose smile kindles the universe,
> That Beauty in which all things work and move,
> That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
> Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
> Which, through the web of being blindly wove
> By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
> Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.
>
> " The breath whose might I have invoked in song
> Descends on me ; my spirit's bark is driven
> Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
> Whose sails were never to the tempest given ;
> The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven !
> I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar ;
> Whilst burning through the inmost veil of heaven,
> The soul of Adonais, like a star,
> Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are."

"HELLAS."

Hellas is one more surprise for students of Shelley—one more example of the fecundity and versatility of his genius. It is, as he says in his preface, "a mere improvise, written at the suggestion of the events of the moment;" and he apologizes for the display of "newspaper erudition" to be found in it. He has created this splendid lyrical drama from such imperfect glimpses of contemporary history as the periodicals of the day afforded him; his imagination seizing upon what was ideal and eternal in the transient events, as they passed before his eyes. The political situation of the moment which he has thus immortalized was in its main features very similar to that of our own time, and his shrewd remarks upon the policy of the various European Powers are not without their point now, when we have to deal with what is essentially a more developed phase of the same policy, "The English," he says, "permit their own oppressors to act according to their natural sympathy with the Turkish tyrant, and to brand upon their name the indelible blot of an alliance with the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity, and civilization.

"Russia desires to possess, not to liberate Greece; and is contented to see the Turks, its natural enemies, and the Greeks, its intended slaves, enfeeble each other until one or both fall into its net. The wise and generous policy of England would have consisted in establishing the independence of Greece, and in maintaining it both against Russia and the Turks;—but when was the oppressor generous or just?"

In the body of the poem also there some bitter things said of various nations, which still have a sting. Among others, England comes in for the following testimonials as to her character, not altogether inappropriate now. A messenger announces to the Sultan various misfortunes to his arms, and then proceeds :

> "Nor is there hope
> But from the Briton : at once slave and tyrant,
> His wishes still are weaker than his fears,
> Or he would sell what faith may yet remain
> From the oaths broke in Genoa and in Norway ;
> And if you buy him not, your treasury
> Is empty even of promises—his own coin."

What Shelley would have thought of our "Peace with honour" policy may be surmised.

The fragment of the Prologue to *Hellas* seems to indicate that the original design for the poem was on a Titanic scale. In this fragment, which unfortunately remains very incomplete, Satan, Christ, and Mahomet appear as rival claimants for Greece. Shelley's conception of Christ, who here appears as the champion of liberty and civilization, and speaks of

> "Plato's sacred light,
> Of which my spirit was a burning morrow,"

may be better discussed when the general relation of his doctrines to Christianity is under consideration. Satan, as the proud Spirit of Evil, taunts Christ with his weakness, proclaims him his own vicegerent, and calls on Famine and Pestilence, Superstition and War, to dog his footsteps ; and Christ rebukes him, as Prometheus the Furies.

The drama itself has a lyrical rather than a dramatic interest—some of the choruses rivalling the lyrics of the *Prometheus*, for perfection of music, if not for depth of meaning. The blank verse is also full of easy majesty and sonorous strength, some of the descriptive passages being magnificent. The splendid ideal descriptions of battle-scenes contrast remarkably with those in *Laon and Cythna*. There all was weak, confused, unrealizable in imagination; here all is vigorous and vividly picturesque. Mighty visions of struggling Titans rise before the reader's eyes, and modern warfare assumes gigantic and supernatural proportions—fighting ships looming dimly through lurid battle-smoke, and charging hosts encountering amid the earth-shaking thunder of artillery. Shelley compares himself, "magno nec proximus intervallo," with Isaiah and Virgil, who saw beyond the evil which surrounded them a possible golden age for the world; and there is something in the manner in which he has wrought the politics of his day into an epic poem which really resembles the method of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets.

The sublime choruses in *Hellas* require little comment. Their general purport is obvious enough, and to rhapsodize upon their beauty would be an impertinence. The majestic stream of music, which bursts forth in the first scene like a limpid spring, gathers volume and meaning, until it ceases at last in a murmured prophecy:

> "Another Athens shall arise,
> And to remoter time
> Bequeath, like sunset to the skies
> The splendour of its prime;

And leave, if nought so bright may live,
All earth can take or heaven can give.

" Saturn and Love their long repose
Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued :
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears and symbol flowers.

" O cease ! must hate and death return ?
Cease ! must men kill and die ?
Cease ! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past,
O might it die or rest at last ! "

The most important question opened up by this lyrical drama is that of Shelley's relations with Christianity. It was doubtless his unappeasable yearning to be made one with the mysterious Being whom he felt to be hidden in the depths of the universe, which chiefly led Mr. Browning to the opinion that, had his life been spared, he would have become a Christian—that, deeply imbued with Christian ethics as he was, he might finally have accepted Christ as the supreme incarnation of the quickening Spirit of the universe, that divine Love in a human form, mortal, yet transcending mortality, which he sought in vain through the world. This is not absolutely impossible, though his theory of life must have undergone a profound change, his faith in the power or beneficence of the Spirit of the universe must have received a profound shock, before he could have accepted the Christian doctrine of the Fall and Redemption in its

popular form. There is not the smallest evidence in his writings of a leaning towards that lurid pessimism which regards the human race as utterly corrupt by nature, and justly doomed to eternal damnation; not a word to show that he had a sense of his own exceeding sinfulness, or felt the need of a Saviour to drag him painfully from the pit of his richly merited torments. What he did yearn for was an intelligible theory of the universe, a conscious union with its good principle, perfect love and friendship on earth, and a still-ascending life beyond the grave. It is quite possible that further experience of the world, the life men lead there, and "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," might have brought Shelley into sympathy with the deeper ideas of Christianity; that a rung or two, either still wanting or manifestly rotten, in his celestial ladder might thence have been supplied; and that a more perfect *theoria*, or vision of divine things, than any heretofore attained, might have been the result. Where St. Paul sees dimly and stammers, Shelley might have seen and spoken more clearly, until the gospel should be no longer foolishness to the Greeks. All this is, of course, a mere surmise. What is manifest is that while Shelley's ideal ethics were in some respects more Christian than those of the Christians themselves—that, in fact, he is the only English poet who has given any intense expression to the doctrine of loving one's neighbour as one's self, resisting not evil with evil, but rendering good for evil, and the like—his conception of the Christian scheme was singularly shallow; and even

where, as in *Epipsychidion*, he may almost be said to reflect the Christian idea of regeneration faintly, as the moon reflects the sunlight, he is evidently quite unconscious that he has written a poem in which a Christian mystic might find at least as much food for spiritual contemplation as in that more sensuous love-song known as Solomon's. If Christ be an historical personage, not a solar myth, his position in history is something quite different from that of the Greek philosophers. When Shelley speaks of his spirit being "a burning morrow" of "Plato's sacred light," he speaks but a limited truth. When he calls Socrates "the Jesus Christ of Greece," he is still in the region of superficial resemblances. The death of Socrates was martyrdom for an idea, like many other martyrdoms; the death of Christ, regarded from the Christian standpoint, as it should be regarded in estimating its significance in the world's history, was something more than a martyrdom. It was a sacrifice for sin; and these words, *sacrifice*, *atonement*, *redemption*, *conversion*, *forgiveness of sins*, *regeneration*, etc., belong to a region of mystical ideas different from that of Plato and Socrates, though presenting some singular points of resemblance. That Christ was a peripatetic Essene philosopher may be very true; but it is not as such that he has seized upon the imagination of mankind. The Christian *theoria*, as initiated by St. Paul and the other apostles, and developed by the Church, may be a mythical system grafted on to the historical Christ; nay Christ himself may even be a solar myth; yet his death, mythical though it be, has been of infinitely more im-

portance than that of any mere philosophic martyr. The blood of Christ, whether ever really poured forth upon the historical Calvary or not, is an idea, a type, the symbol of a real spiritual force, capable of working through the human imagination strange transformations in the human spirit. Beneath the horrible husk of fraud, hypocrisy, superstition, and cruelty, which have been the external characteristics of Christianity, there have always been regenerating spiritual forces at work. Through the gross materialism of the dogmas for which Christians have cursed and burnt each other have shone, more or less dimly, into the hearts of even those bloody bigots who have worshipped Christ with rites that might have propitiated the devil, spiritual truths which have aided in the development of humanity.

This mystical aspect of Christianity Shelley seems to have simply ignored, even while his own philosophy is full of dim suggestions of mystical ideas which have their counterpart in Christianity. He probably calmly relegated it to the realm of superstition, conceiving that he had absorbed what was true and left what was false in Christianity; and that his own aspiration after Eternal Beauty, and inspiration with divine Love, represented the quintessence of all religions, the Christian included. That it really did so is not altogether improbable. Words are such imperfect symbols of our inmost thoughts and emotions, that possibly Shelley's spiritual experiences were not so widely different from those of men of more definite religious creeds than at first sight appears; while in worshipping the Spirit

of the universe as Beauty, not Holiness, he expresses a philosophic conception deeper and wider, although for average minds vaguer, than that expressed in the Christian *theoria*. For Shelley, aspiration after the ideal was a perpetual process of regeneration, and the perfect harmony of man, body, soul, and spirit, in himself and with the Spirit of Nature, was eternal life. This Spirit of Nature was, however, not the Spirit of Nature of the ordinary pantheist, but rather a spirit which is itself straightened and vexed by the imperfections which "cabin, crib, confine" the human mind. He aimed at a development of humanity more complete and harmonious than anything which Christianity has consciously proposed to itself; the weak point of his system being his non-perception of the fact that, for the average man, holiness—in the sense of aspiration after the best ideal conceivable by each individual in his own age and circumstances—is unattainable except by intense and persistent effort. While, therefore, Shelley's philosophy seems rather vague, thin, and bloodless beside that of Blake, who was more deeply imbued with the spirit of the Bible than he, as an awakening spiritual force he must rank with the best men of his age, whether Christian or pagan. His hyper-optimistic conception of average human nature, both as to its goodness and power over circumstances, was but a reaction against the hyper-pessimistic theory of popular Christianity, and was gradually toning down to a more rational pitch, as his experience of life increased; and this was at the root of what is false in his ethics.

Dramatic Fragments.

The Cenci was such an undeniable triumph, that it is much to be regretted that Shelley did not live to follow up this first wonderful essay in dramatic writing by some others; and the two fine fragments of plays which he has left make this regret still more poignant. So little is left of the romantic drama which was to have had an Indian Enchantress for its heroine, that without Mrs. Shelley's account of the plot it would have been impossible to surmise this; though, even without a knowledge of the plot, enough of the situation might have been discovered from the speeches of the Indian Youth and the Lady to make the scene between them perfectly intelligible. That between the Enchantress and the Spirit is only begun, and probably rejected by Shelley as worthless. The Enchantress's song is a piece of musical verse, but wanting in true lyrical inspiration, and the Spirit's speech, which in its opening echoes that of the Spirit in *Comus*, has no dramatic interest.

The scene between the Youth and the Lady, though diffuse, is full of beautiful things, most simply and delicately expressed, in pure and limpid verse which flows with the sparkling ease of a stream over pebbles. The Lady loves a Pirate—a man "of savage but noble nature," who is beloved by the Enchantress, whom he has deserted for his old love. A storm brewed by the Enchantress has cast him upon her enchanted isle, where the Lady is led "in a mysterious manner" by "a good spirit who watches over the Pirate's fate." The Indian

Youth, who loves the Lady, and whose love is returned by her with mere sisterly affection, meets her unexpectedly on the island, and neither apparently at first recognizes the other. They enter into conversation, the Lady having proffered the Youth her sympathy. He accepts it with passionate fervour, and asks if she too has not loved. Her reply stamps her at once as one of Shelley's women, though of a type much less heroic than Cythna :

> "Loved! O, I love! Methinks
> This word of love is fit for all the world,
> And that for gentle hearts another name
> Would speak of gentler thoughts than the world owns.
> I have loved."

Her reminiscences of her happy days of love are uttered gently, with a brooding dovelike moan ; but the simple truth and trustfulness of her character comes out more distinctly in her description of her wild lover :

> "He was so awful, yet
> So beautiful in mystery and terror,
> Calming me as the loveliness of heaven
> Soothes the unquiet sea :—and yet not so,
> For he seem'd stormy, and would often seem
> A quenchless sun mask'd in portentous clouds ;
> For such his thoughts, and even his actions were ;
> But he was not of them, nor they of him,
> But as they hid his splendour from the earth.
> Some said he was a man of blood and peril,
> And steep'd in bitter infamy to the lips.
> More need was there I should be innocent ;
> More need that I should be most true and kind ;
> And much more need that there should be found one
> To share remorse, and scorn, and solitude,
> And all the ills that wait on those who do
> The tasks of ruin in the world of life.
> He fled, and I have follow'd him."

This speech suggests a woman full of a gentle Desdemona-like devotion, who, having once chosen her hero, remains true to him, allowing no clouds of external fact to come between her and her ideal conception of his character.

The remainder of the scene is taken up with a long account of the growth of a magical plant, by means of which the Spirit appears to have conveyed her to the island. Probably the fruit which lay "like a sleeping lizard" upon the waters of "the glassy pool" was meant to have become one of Shelley's favourite magic boats, and to have wafted the Lady over the sea. All this description, exquisite as it is, is rather out of place in a drama; but we must remember that the poem was written to amuse his own small circle of friends in the winter months. It was but the toy of his poetic phantasy.

Charles I. is the torso of a play of a very different kind—a work of toil and thought; and to judge from the fine fragment we have, it might have been a masterpiece worthy to stand beside Shakespeare's historical plays. The first scene, in which the citizens wait for the pageant in honour of the coming of the Queen, is an admirable opening for the play, letting us hear the low, ominous mutterings of the popular storm which is so soon to burst. The Queen comes, like a fair spirit of royal prerogative, to tempt Charles to strut boldly upon the stage of the world; but with the pageantry in which she moves are mingled squalid and miserable forms, and the curses of the Puritan party drone on like a ground

bass beneath the blare of her trumpets. In the person of the Second Citizen Shelley has given a most lifelike portrait of a sour Puritan whose anti-prelatic zeal would serve the Lord by stabbing all the bishops under the fifth rib. His growling commentary on the passing pageant has in it something of a prophetic strain, as he rebukes the thoughtlessness of his son, who feasts his eyes with innocent delight upon the show. The passage in which he and the Third Citizen express their hatred of Laud and the Queen is as dramatic as anything of the kind in Shakespeare :

"*First Citizen.*

That
Is the Archbishop.

Second Citizen.

Rather say the Pope :
London will be soon his Rome. He walks
As if he trod upon the heads of men :
He looks elate, drunken with blood and gold.
Beside him moves the Babylonian woman
Invisibly, and with her as his shadow,
Mitred adulterer ! he is joined in sin,
Which turns Heaven's milk of mercy to revenge.

Third Citizen (*lifting up his eyes*).

Good Lord ! rain it down upon him ! . . .
Amid her ladies walks the papist queen,
As if her nice feet scorn'd our English earth.
The Canaanitish Jezebel ! I would be
A dog if I might tear her with my teeth !"

Nothing better than this, and the final speech of the Second Citizen, in which he moralizes upon the splendid masque and the squalid anti-masque, can be conceived.

Every word is absolutely right. The youth is perhaps a little too ideal and Shelleyan; but his imaginative speeches contrast almost pathetically with the passionate utterances of his father and the rest.

The second scene, which presents us to the King, Queen, Laud, Strafford, and Archy, the King's jester, is a long one, and, thanks to the indefatigable zeal of Mr. Rossetti, is now tolerably perfect. It is, in conception and execution, so splendid that it astonishes even the reader who is familiar with *The Cenci*, with the grandeur of its scope and the vigour of its dramatic style. It fills him with new wonder to find Shelley quietly displaying such a power of conceiving and representing characters of very different types—to be forced to confess that for work such as this we must go back to Shakespeare, and that it is by no means clear that the older poet has done much better in the introductory scenes of his historical plays. Spite of his professed want of interest in English history, Shelley showed a true insight in choosing the grandest subject for dramatic treatment that a poet could find in the whole course of it; and it is plain that he must have carefully studied the episode which he chose. The manner in which he has sketched in the King's character, and surrounded him with potent influences of various kinds, is most masterly. His conception of Charles, if we may venture to judge of it by this one scene, would seem to be that of a gentle idealist, with much personal lovableness, and an affectionate domestic nature, transformed into a tyrant by being the slave of a tyrannical

idea. Charles is the martyr of the divine right of kings. He begins his blindfold walk to the scaffold in this, the first scene in which he appears. God has hardened his heart like that of Egyptian Pharaoh, and he sets out obstinately on his conscientious path of wrong-doing, paving his way with good intentions. There is something more than imposing, something almost noble, in the uncompromising wrong-headedness with which this doomed king marches over the volcanic soil of real life, in all the pageantry of his ideal royalty. The melancholy, mystical face, that Vandyke painted so often, looks out from the page in which he gives his tyrannical orders with gentle dignity, no less than from that in which he as gently defends Archy, as if he were a pet monkey, from the anger of Laud. His friendship for Strafford is genuine, and his promises to him sincere. It is only stress of circumstances which will make him a Jesuit, by the hiatus left between his ideal and its realization. His speech to the Queen expresses his philosophy of royalty simply and clearly :

"Beloved friend,
God is my witness that this weight of power,
Which he sets me my earthly task to wield
Under his law, is my delight and pride
Only because thou lovest that and me.
For a king bears the office of a god
To all the under world ; and to his God
Alone he must deliver up his trust,
Unshorn of its permitted attributes.
It seems now as the baser elements
Had mutinied against the golden sun
That kindles them to harmony, and quells
Their self-destroying rapine. The wild million

Strike at the eye that guides them ; like as humours
Of the distemper'd body that conspire
Against the spirit of life throned in the heart,—
And thus become the prey of one another,
And last of death."

Strafford, the shrewd practical instrument of tyranny, flatters the King's ambition in his reply :

" That which would be ambition in a subject
Is duty in a sovereign ; for on him,
As on a keystone, hangs the arch of life,
Whose safety is its strength. Degree and form,
And all that makes the age of reasoning man
More memorable than a beast's, depend
On this—that right should fence itself inviolably
With power ; in which respect the state of England
From usurpation by the violent commons
Cries for reform."

He goes on to advocate strong measures, and the King enthusiastically declares :

" Your words shall be my deeds :
You speak the image of my thought."

He then hails him as his friend, and gives his kingly word of honour that Strafford shall have *carte blanche* to act as he pleases in Ireland, the King assuming the responsibility of his acts.

Henrietta is herself a spirit of ambition perpetually breathed into the King's ear. She plays the part of Lady Macbeth to this gentle and dignified Macbeth of English liberty. With all the eager unscrupulousness of a woman, she has a woman's tenderness and a woman's practical wit, and her tongue can sting and

flatter as it suits her purpose. In her first speech she contrasts the prerogative of the English with that of the French king, with something like a covert sneer, which St. John rebukes with sarcastic courtesy. Next she praises her consort's resolution :

> "My dearest lord,
> I see the new-born courage in your eye
> Arm'd to strike dead the spirit of the time,
> Which spurs to rage the many-headed beast."

Further on, she protests and weeps when the King speaks of summoning a parliament. Lastly, she takes him to see his sleeping child :

> " Over whose sweet beauty I have wept for joy
> A thousand times—and now should weep for sorrow,
> Did I not think that after we were dead
> Our fortunes would spring high in him, and that
> The cares we waste upon our heavy crown
> Would make it light and glorious as a wreath
> Of heaven's beams for his dear innocent brow."

A woman with a purpose is the subtlest of influences in the domestic life of a man. She can make that purpose the very atmosphere of his thoughts.

The character of Laud, the fanatic High Churchman, already at civil war with the Puritan party, is a masterpiece of vivid portraiture. The rage of his uncompromising orthodoxy burns luridly in every word he utters. The desperate seriousness of his grim and narrow soul, which invests him with a hierarchical haughtiness, wherein mere personal pride is fused and swallowed up, makes him childishly resentful of the licensed buffoonery of Archy. His first words are a demand that the Jester shall be whipped for daring a melancholy jest at his expense.

"*King.*

My lord of Canterbury.

Archy.

The fool is here.

Laud.

I crave permission of your Majesty
To order that this insolent fellow be
Chastised: he mocks the sacred character,
Scoffs at the state, and——

King.

What, my Archy?
He mocks and mimics all he sees and hears,
Yet with a quaint and graceful license. Prithee,
For this once do not as Prynne would, were he
Primate of England. . . .

Laud.

I take with patience, as my Master did,
All scoffs permitted from above."

What divine right is for Charles, dogmatic religion is for Laud. Each is a rigid idealist who would make the laws of the universe bend to a theory, and stem the tide of the great sea of human thought with magical incantations which have lost their power. Laud would cling to his empty ark of the Covenant, and defy the lightnings of God in God's own name. The speech in which he calls on Charles to deliver Scotland up to the vengeance of the Church is admirable. After pleading the necessity of torture and death in dealing with schismatics, he goes on:

"I laugh at those weak rebels who, desiring
What we possess, still prate of Christian peace;
As if those dreadful arbitrating messengers

Which play the part of God 'twixt right and wrong,
Should be let loose against the innocent sleep
Of templed cities and the smiling fields,
For some poor argument of policy
Which touches our own profit or our pride,
Where it indeed were Christian charity
To turn the cheek even to the smiter's hand :
And, when our great Redeemer, when our God,
When he who gave, accepted, and retained
Himself in propitiation of our sins
Is scorn'd in his immediate ministry,
With hazard of inestimable loss
Of all the truth and discipline which is
Salvation to the extremest generation
Of men innumerable, they talk of peace !
Such peace as Canaan found, let Scotland now :
For, by that Christ who came to bring a sword,
Not peace, upon the earth, and gave command
To his disciples at the Passover
That each should sell his robe and buy a sword,—
Once strip that minister of naked wrath,
And it shall never sleep in peace again
Till Scotland bend or break."

The character of Archy is less distinctly a success. Shelley has evidently modelled him upon the Fool in *King Lear*, whose weird and pale mockery of mirth lights up with its Will-o'-the-wisplike flickering the tragic gloom of the sorrow of Lear. There is true Shakespearean irony in making the fool Archy the seer who, with prophetic eye, reads the future in the signs of the times. The conception of the melancholy Jester, who reproduces something of the almost supernatural character of Lear's Fool, is a subtle one ; and it is rather in particular details of his speeches, than in their general outline, that Shelley has fallen short of his conception. There is in

them a suspicion of calculation, effort, and conscious Shakespearean imitation, which mars their spontaneous vitality.

In Archy's skit at the Lake Poets we have a reminiscence of Lear's Fool's speech: "This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time." Archy's prophesy is, however, so apposite, and his allusion to the Pantisocracy and Coleridge's homilies so distinctly marks the growth of freedom in the interval between King Charles and King George, that the anachronism becomes an artistic beauty.

"*Laud.*

Hazlerig, Hampden, Pym, young Harry Vane,
Cromwell, and other rebels of less note,
Intend to sail with the next favouring wind
For the Plantations.

Archy.

Where they think to found
A commonwealth like Gonzalo's in the play,
Gynæcocœnic and pantisocratic.

King.

What's that, sirrah?

Archy.

New devil's politics.
Hell is the pattern of all commonwealths:
Lucifer was the first republican.
Will you hear Merlin's prophecy, how three poets
'In one brainless skull, when the whitethorn is full,
Shall sail round the world, and come back again:
Shall sail round the world in a brainless skull,
And come back again when the moon is at full'?
When in spite of the Church,
They will hear homilies of whatever length
Or form they please."

The quick-witted Queen notes the ominous nature of these strange utterances of Archy, and calls the King's attention to them. His reply, though meant to comfort her, has in it something like a boding sigh.

"*Queen.*

My beloved lord,
Have you not noted that the Fool of late
Has lost his careless mirth, and that his words
Sound like the echoes of our saddest fears?
What can it mean? I should be loth to think
Some factious slave had tutor'd him.

King.

Oh no!
He is but Occasion's pupil. Partly 'tis
That our minds piece the vacant intervals
Of his wild words with their own fashioning,—
As in the imagery of summer clouds,
Or coals of the winter fire, idlers find
The perfect shadows of their teeming thoughts;
And partly, that the terrors of the time
Are sown by wandering Rumour in all spirits;
And in the lightest and the least may best
Be seen the current of the coming wind."

In the third scene, in the Star Chamber, Laud, as judge, is boldly rebuked by Bastwick, who exults in the thought that his judges are heaping damnation on their own heads, and that their persecutions, which he provokes them to increase, may win him the crown of martyrdom:

"Were I an enemy of my God and King
And of good men, as ye are;—I should merit
Your fearful state and gilt prosperity,
Which, when ye wake from the last sleep, shall turn
To cowls and robes of everlasting fire.

But, as I am, I bid ye grudge me not
The only earthly favour ye can yield,
Or I think worth acceptance at your hands,—
Scorn, mutilation, and imprisonment."

Juxon interferes to prevent Laud from taking Bastwick at his word, by slitting his tongue and striking off his hands ; and Laud's answer to him is characteristic of the iron nature of the man :

"*Laud.*

Much more such 'mercy' among men would be,
Did all the ministers of Heaven's revenge
Flinch thus from earthly retribution. I
Could suffer what I would inflict."

He then proceeds to sentence Bishop Williams, to whom he owed his first promotion, claiming the privilege of pronouncing judgment upon him, in order to show that he has put aside all thoughts except the Church's service.

In the fourth short fragment of a scene, the fine passages from Hampden's speech are like a peep of blue sky through the gathering gloom ; and the fifth fragment is interesting as connecting the beautiful song, *A widow bird sate mourning*, with her name of Archy, who, no doubt, as Mr. Rossetti suggests, sings it at a much later period of the play, when Charles is dead or in prison.

The impression left upon the mind, after reading all that we possess of *Charles I.*, is that the world's loss in losing Shelley is something of which we can form no adequate idea.

The scene from *Torquato Tasso*, written at an earlier

period (1818), is too fragmentary to serve as a basis for conjecture as to what this play would have been. Tasso himself does not appear, and the hasty sketch for a song for him has little merit as a Shelleyan lyric.

"The Triumph of Life."

Charles I. was thrown aside for *The Triumph of Life*, the great philosophic poem on which Shelley was engaged when he was so untimely snatched away from this world. The sonorous march of the *terza rima*, so subtle in its interwoven music, yet so broad and majestic in its rhythmical flow, is marvellously fitted to the processional character of the great vision it describes. Here, as elsewhere, the forms created by the poet's imagination have something of the majestic beauty of Greek sculpture, while they palpitate with an intense life which is quite modern. From Dante and Petrarch he has absorbed much, but what he has absorbed he has re-created, and filled with deeper meaning and more ethereal beauty. The poem is nothing less than the epic of human life—the tragic story of the Promethean struggle of the spirit of man against the disintegrating forces of the world—only begun indeed, but begun on such a scale, and with such a mastery of handling, that the fragment stands, like the torso of a Phidian god, the revelation of regions new and fair in the world of man's creation.

The opening of the poem is one of Shelley's supremely

beautiful pieces of nature-poetry, in which nothing is merely described, but the spirit of the scene is made to live with supernatural life in the reader's imagination. The dawn itself is a supernal essence, coming gradually into existence as we gaze :

" Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth
Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask

" Of darkness fell from the awaken'd Earth—
The smokeless altars of the mountain snows
Flamed above crimson clouds, and at the birth

" Of light the Ocean's orison arose,
To which the birds temper'd their matin lay.
All flowers in field or forest which unclose

" Their trembling eyelids in the kiss of day,
Swinging their censers in the element,
With orient incense lit by the new ray

" Burn'd slow and inconsumably, and sent
Their odorous sighs up to the smiling air ;
And, in succession due, did continent,

" Isle, ocean, and all things that in them wear
The form and character of mortal mould,
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear

" Their portion of the toil, which he of old
Took as his own, and then imposed on them.
But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold

" Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem
The cone of night, now they were laid asleep
Stretched my faint limbs beneath the hoary stem

"Which an old chestnut flung athwart the deep
Of a green Apennine: before me fled
The night; behind me rose the day; the deep

"Was at my feet, and heaven above my head;
When a strange trance over my fancy grew
Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread

"Was so transparent that the scene came through,
As clear as, when a veil of light is drawn
O'er evening hills, they glimmer; and I knew

"That I had felt the freshness of that dawn
Bathe in the same cold dew my brow and hair,
And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn

"Under the self-same bough, and heard as there
The birds, the fountains, and the ocean hold
Sweet talk in music through the enamour'd air.

"And then a vision on my brain was roll'd."

Then follows the magnificent description of the vision, in a series of stanzas tangled together most subtly in all the beautiful intricacy of the *terza rima*—an artistic tanglement which seems to suggest the mazy movement of the processional dance around the car of Life. For anything like a parallel in our literature to this vision of Shelley's, we must go back to that *Vision concerning Piers the Ploughman*, seen by Langland on Malvern Hills, the solemn opening of which it dimly recalls. There is here the same solemnity, the same earnestness; the reader feels that he is in the presence of a man who has really seen in vision the things he describes. But Langland is homely, almost prosaic, save for his mystical melancholy, and the flame of ethical rage which burns beneath his homely words. His thoughts bear somewhat the

same relation to Shelley's, that his monotonous, short-cadenced alliterative metre bears to the oceanic music of this *terza rima*, with its sounding swell and long-delayed refluence, its sinuous windings and gliding advance, its endless cadences and half-cadences, which tantalize the ear into new and ever-renewed delight, until the full close falls as gently as sleep upon lovers' eyelids.

The poet sees a vast multitude,

> "Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,"

all hastening onward along a public way—

> "Some flying from the thing they fear'd, and some
> Seeking the object of another's fear."

As he looks, the moonlike car of Life passes by—a cold glare, which extinguishes the sun with its blinding light, proceeding from it. It is noteworthy, whether Shelley had any such distinct reference in this symbolism or not, that the sun is here, as in *Epipsychidion*, the type of the ideal, the moon of the actual; but here the moon eclipses the sun, instead of being its satellite as in the former poem. The shape which sits in the car, like the ghost of the dead moon in the arms of the new, is like "one whom years deform;" and she crouches within the shadow of a tomb. She is thus a type of the phenomenal—what Blake calls the "vegetable," as opposed to eternal, life. Her charioteer is "a Janus-visaged shadow," with his four faces blindfolded. He may, perhaps, be the human intelligence, and the drift of the very obscure passage—

> "Little profit brings

"Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
Nor then avail the beams that quench the sun :
Or that with banded eyes could pierce the sphere

"Of all that is, has been, or will be done,"

may then be guessed at, with the help of Mr. Rossetti's conjecture that the phrase "that with banded eyes" is equivalent to *the charioteer*. It may mean that the *lumen siccum* of reason avails nothing for the discovery of the great problems of life—whence we are and why. Otherwise the intelligence could transcend the sphere of the phenomenal. The words "pierce the sphere" are ambiguous. They may mean that the charioteer is within the sphere "of all that is, has been, or will be done"—this being, as I have taken it to be, equivalent to the phenomenal world ; or they may mean that he is below or outside that sphere, which might then be understood to be that of the perfect science of the phenomenal. The first appears to be the most obvious sense.

The car rolls on, the great ones of the earth driven along with it. The young dance maniacally in the van a moment, and then are left behind, as old men and women, foully disarrayed, yet dancing still. As the poet looks, asking himself, "What shape is that within the car?" a voice replies, "Life!" He turns, and finds Rousseau, now become a strangely distorted shape ; and their colloquy occupies the remainder of the fragment. His first words are a warning :

"If thou canst, forbear
To join the dance, which I had well forborne!"

He then goes on to moralize upon his own failure:

> "I fear'd, loved, hated, suffer'd, did, and died;
> And if the spark with which Heaven lit my spirit
> Had been with purer nutriment supplied,
>
> "Corruption would not now thus much inherit
> Of what was once Rousseau,—nor this disguise
> Stain that which ought to have disdain'd to wear it."

His life was cankered from within, not from without; by his own inherent defect, not from stress of circumstances.

> "I was overcome
> By my own heart alone."

In this he differs remarkably from Shelley's earlier heroes, who have no taint of original sin, or at least no sense of this taint. The whole poem is, indeed, the product of a new and more practical conception of the problems of life.

The captives chained to the car are "the wise, the great, the unforgotten."

> "Their lore
>
> "Taught them not this, to know themselves; their might
> Could not repress the mystery within;
> And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night
>
> "Caught them ere evening."

These are strangely mournful words for Shelley to write, if we are to suppose that Rousseau is the exponent of his own views. His favourite, Plato, is chained to the car, no less than Alexander and Napoleon, Aristotle and Bacon. The lines describing the modern conqueror,

> "Whose grasp had left the giant world so weak
> That every pygmy kick'd it as it lay,"

remind the student of Blake of his grand and sombre "fresco" of the "spiritual form of Napoleon" grasping at the sun and moon. On Shelley's imagination, Napoleon left a Titanic impression, not unlike that which gave rise to Blake's strange picture. The *Lines on hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon*, in which the Earth is represented as bursting into half-hysterical exultation when her terrible progeny returns to her bosom, and yields her up once more the store of power of which he had drained it, are themselves cast in a Titanic mould, as though the Pan's pipe of ordinary lyrical poetry had suddenly expanded into an organ, from the sheer force of the blast blown through it. In *The Triumph of Life* Napoleon's fate is thus moralized in the following lines:—

> "And much I grieved to think how power and will
> In opposition rule our mortal day,
>
> "And why God made irreconcileable
> Good and the means of good."

Here also we have a proof of Shelley's clearer conception of the complexity of the problems of life, and in particular of that of the existence and nature of evil.

The remainder of the extant portion of this great poem consists of the ideal story of Rousseau's life, told by him in answer to the poet's grave questions:

> "'Whence comest thou? and whither goest thou?
> How did thy course begin?' I said, 'and why?'"

He tells how he gradually awakened from the sleep

of birth, but of what his ante-natal life had been his memory keeps no record:

> "And whether life had been before that sleep
> The heaven which I imagine, or a hell
>
> "Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep,
> I know not."

But, as in Wordsworth's ode,

> "For a space
> The scene of woods and waters seem'd to keep,
>
> "Though it was now broad day, a gentle trace
> Of light diviner than the common sun
> Sheds on the common earth."

With "the bright omnipresence" of morning came the vision of a beautiful woman, holding in her hand a crystal glass of the sorrow-soothing liquor nepenthe. She would seem to be a temptress come to betray him into the power of Life; for when he asked her whence he came, where he is, and why, she bade him drink of her cup, and on his doing so his eyes were opened to the vision of the car, in the light of which she vanished, still, however, remaining half-perceptible beside him. Through her he passed from desire to disillusion, from the ideal to the actual, and was borne on amid the multitude who dance around the car of Life. Then befell a new wonder, for all the earth became grey with phantoms, and the air was peopled with them, crowding as thickly as the bats that, eclipsing the sun, bring premature night to some Indian isle. These phantoms are emanations from the souls, as they slowly decay in the deadly atmosphere of life. Those from whom most of

these emanations proceed, and who have least strength and beauty, perish soonest.

Here the poem ends abruptly with the grand query :

"'Then, what is life?' I cried."

What the answer to this would have been, and how far it would have been the right one, Shelley has never returned to tell us. That the apparently unredeemed despair of this early portion of his Epic of Man would have had some more hopeful sequel ; that the Triumph of Life would have been no mere triumph of that lower life which is death, may be inferred from the whole tenour of his writings. Perhaps some vision of the divine Love might have appeared to irradiate the gloom of this mortal world. Rousseau says that the batlike swarm of personal emanations, or phantom ideas, was

"A wonder worthy of the rhyme

"Of him who from the lowest depths of hell,
Through every paradise, and through all glory,
Love led serene, and who return'd to tell

"The words of hate and awe ; the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured except Love."

We are indeed made to feel, with Prometheus, that all hope is vain but love. If love be not the aspiration of the human soul toward some vital Spirit of the universe ; if it be not the earnest of something "eternal in the heavens, which faileth not," then life is indeed "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." We are but the slaves of the harlot Pleasure, or the prisoners of the stern gaoler Duty.

EPILOGUE.

In taking leave of Shelley, after such a chronological study of his works as we have attempted, I feel how impossible it is to say exactly the right word about him, in his relations with our modern world, in which he was so strange an apparition. Must we turn away from his faith in the august presence of the unseen Spirit of Nature, with something between a smile and a sigh? Must we regard his poetry, so rich in hope, so intense in aspiration, as a beautiful bubble, blown out of the cloudy vapour of a dream, by the breath of vain imagination, and destined to collapse at the touch of truth; or, at best, the plaything of æsthetic dilettanteism—a marble god taken from his ruined temple, to adorn a villa—a Madonna torn from her abandoned shrine, to be the gem of some connoisseur's picture-gallery? For my own part, I have more confidence in the visionary faculty than to think so. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" in a deeper sense than is apparent to the superficial thinker; and when new ideas take irresistible possession of the human imagination, it is because they correspond to

something real in the universe. Great prophecies become the occasion of their own fulfilment, and the very limitations of Nature recede indefinitely before human will and human intelligence, which are themselves natural forces. Whatever be man's fate in other worlds than this, in this world his fortune is largely regulated by his desires. The imagination that sighed after human beauty, and peopled Olympus with gods, and Athens with men a little lower than they—that fed with delight upon the mysteries of mediæval Christianity, and built the Gothic cathedrals to worship in, is not yet dead; and now it aspires after some more satisfying religion, some more supreme human perfection. As surely as our lower mechanical intelligence has framed the steam-engine and the electric telegraph out of the elements of the physical world, because men desired to travel fast and to transmit news rapidly, so surely will our higher intelligence evolve a more satisfactory society out of the jarring elements of the moral world, when men earnestly desire the happiness of their fellow-creatures. And this now, at length, after ages of hatred and strife, of selfishness, disguised or undisguised, they are beginning to do. To quote once more Shelley's own words: "I look with an eye of hope and pleasure on the present state of things, gloomy and incapable of improvement as they may seem to others. It delights me to see that men begin to think and act for the good of others."

That Temple of Nature, which Goethe, in his *Märchen*, described as lying built underground, and ready to rise when the time is fully come, begins even now to stir the

overlying crust of our ugly and chaotic world with throes of earthquake; and Shelley, like the Hawk with the mirror, which illuminated the body of the dead Prince with light which was the earnest of his happy resurrection, flashes down upon us the beams of the yet unrisen sun of the coming day.

THE END.

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